

## **The bombshell - more than munitions 1917-1919**

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**The Bombshell – More than Munitions 1917-1919**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Master of History by Research.

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## Table of Contents

Contents .....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter One – A Metaphorical Window – Examining the Company Magazine .....	10
Chapter Two – More Than Munitions – Women in the Workplace .....	19
Chapter Three – Suffering From Cheerfulness – Humor in The Bombshell .....	35
Chapter Four – The Workings of The Bombshell – Contributions of Literature and Poetry .....	51
Chapter Five – New Beginnings – Continuing The Bombshell.....	63
Conclusion – Just a Company Magazine? .....	76
Bibliography.....	79

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the content of *The Bombshell* during the period 1917 and 1919 in order to explore how the culture of the workforce, predominantly women workers, was represented during a period of both war and peace. This will be performed by examining themes, which appear in *The Bombshell*, of gender and sport, humour and gossip, and literature and poetry. These themes will be scrutinised in order to provide a deeper historical context of the workforce of Thos. Firth & Sons.

## Introduction

‘A National Factory like ours differs from most factories in that its members of various grades have been drawn from many directions. Very few may have known one another before they came here, and as a consequence we have probably suffered from that lack of personal acquaintance of which employees of long-established Firms have the advantage.’<sup>1</sup>

The above passage is from the first issue of *The Bombshell* and describes the challenges which both the employers and employees would face at the Templeborough National Projectile Factory. The passage also displays how a company magazine could acknowledge and assist in meeting these challenges. Working in such stressful conditions required an outlet which would provide workers with much needed and cheerful relief whilst at the same time, from the employer’s point of view, helping to inform the workforce about current news and keeping them up-to-date with all that was happening within the firm. A company magazine like *The Bombshell* would manage to provide a quick release and help workers to focus on something other than work or the war, to help them share their common interests.

This thesis will explore the content of *The Bombshell* from its first issue in March 1917 to beyond the end of the First World War and will complete the study of the magazine in December 1919, long before the in-house journal actually ceased publication. It is the intention of this research to show that investigating the company magazine can present to the historian a unique opportunity to explore the culture of a predominantly female workforce, whilst at a time of war. It will also demonstrate that the company magazine could be used as a propaganda tool to both rally and support its work force. The thesis will examine the following themes in *The Bombshell*; gender and sport, humour and gossip, and literature and poetry.

The shell crisis of 1915 had called for an increase in the production of armaments for Britain in the First World War. Before the war a few private companies, together with three government-owned factories, had supplied the country with its armaments.<sup>2</sup> However, despite employees working around the clock to keep up with the demand, private, official suppliers, including Cammell Lairds, Thomas Firth and Sons, Hadfields and Vickers in Sheffield, were ‘soon unable to meet the ever-growing demand’ for shells.<sup>3</sup> A further contributing factor was that many employees of these firms had already joined the war effort in a bid ‘to play their part in the war’ and had subsequently left a shortage of skilled workers in the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Although these

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Foreword’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> P. Warr, *Sheffield in the Great War* (Barnsley, 2015), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> S. Lomax, *The Home Front* (Barnsley, 2014), p. 41.

vacancies were soon filled and productivity increased there was ‘until March 1915 only approximately one quarter of the required amount ... being produced.’<sup>5</sup>

Initially, skilled men were ‘released for call-up or for more important munition work’ and jobs were ‘assigned to less-qualified individuals.’<sup>6</sup> Eventually, to meet the demand for labour, women were gradually accepted in jobs which they had previously been considered unsuited for. Peter Warr confirms, as a growing amount of men had left to fight for their country ‘less skilled workers of either sex’ were accepted and sought as replacements.<sup>7</sup> The newly formed Ministry of Munitions responded to the shell crisis by establishing ‘more than 200 “national factories” around the country’.<sup>8</sup> In response, in September 1915, Thomas Firth and Sons planned to ‘erect, equip and operate’ their National Projectile Factory at Templeborough.<sup>9</sup> The new National Projectile Factory ‘opened in January 1916 well ahead of any other National Projectile Factory.’<sup>10</sup> Employing approximately 5,700 ‘newly recruited’ workers, the necessity of Firth’s new factory to unify workers and build a relationship between employer and employee was never more evident.<sup>11</sup> Production of shells for the war effort was paramount as was a capable and united workforce that could supply them.

In March 1917, *The Bombshell* was born. Originally the magazine’s planned audience was the firm’s workforce. It was intended that it would be devoted to the interests of the employees and hoped to ‘fill a gap ... to discover buried talents of various kinds and... not be without its humorous side.’<sup>12</sup> C.K. Wright would be the magazine’s editor up until July 1918, when he relinquished the role to T.V. Staton due to ill health.<sup>13</sup> Both men were company employees. With a committee of just five employees, including two women, *The Bombshell* would seek to inform and entertain its readers. The magazine also provided an opportunity for the workers to submit their own stories, poems or illustrations. As ensuing chapters will show, content poured into *The Bombshell*, whether it was in the form of literature, illustrations or good-humoured digs at staff or welfare provisions. Priced at two pence, the first issue would consist of just sixteen pages due to a paper shortage but would later extend to over forty pages. The magazine was soon distributed not only to the workers at Firth’s, but also to soldiers serving overseas. In December 1917 the editor remarked:

“‘The Bombshell’ was originally started with the idea of instructing, amusing, and encouraging the munition workers at this factory ... To me one of the most

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> P. Warr, *Sheffield in the Great War*, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Warr, *Sheffield’s Great War and Beyond* (Barnsley, 2015), p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Foreword’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol 1, No. 1, p. 1

<sup>13</sup> ‘The Templeboro’ Factory’, *The Bombshell*, July, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 10.

gratifying reflections with regard to “The Bombshell” is that in very many cases after our own workers have read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested all its contents, they send out their copies to their husbands, sons, and sweethearts, who are fighting with the British Armies in all the theatres of the War.’<sup>14</sup>

Although The Bombshell was not an original concept, other firms began to copy the example of The Bombshell and publish their own in-house journals. Sanderson’s Kayser’s The House of Saben, among others, would often be mentioned in The *Bombshell*’s own pages which would encourage and congratulate them on their success.

The Bombshell has previously been mentioned in literature albeit very briefly. In Peter Warr’s books *Sheffield and the Great War* and *Sheffield and the Great War and Beyond*, The Bombshell has been examined within the constraints of it being a munitions magazine rather than exploring the content of the magazine. There is also a similar focus with Scott Lomax’s *Sheffield and the Home Front*. Ali Melling, examined women in sport in The Bombshell, though the focus remained on women’s football in *First World War Factories*.<sup>15</sup> This is a problem that Graham Seal also identifies with trench journals. Seal states that while trench journals have been studied before, they have always been regarded ‘as a source of information about particular aspects of the war.’<sup>16</sup> He argues that there has been an emphasis on analysing the content ‘rather than the process and purpose of the trench press itself.’<sup>17</sup> This similar problem has also been apparent with The Bombshell, which Warr describes as ‘a regular factory magazine’ which ‘presented local news and humorous items.’<sup>18</sup> Whilst this is true, it does not present an in-depth view of the magazine to explore the culture of the workforce or the importance of employee relationships to the management. Neither does it examine the way the management would attempt to unite the workers in order to achieve and maintain high productivity. These efforts would include the firm conducting sporting events and galas that the workforce would participate in. As with Seal’s investigation into trench journalism, this study is a cultural inquiry. Its purpose is to understand and investigate the social experiences that were represented within The Bombshell.

Chapter one will address the purpose of company magazines and will examine the research of both Michael Heller and John Griffiths to place The Bombshell in context with similar publications. Griffiths’ examination on the Port Sunlight News will be explored to assess how the in-house journal was used as a historical document to investigate the culture of the company. John Curran’s methodology on exploring media history will be adopted while investigating The Bombshell to assist examining themes such as gender and cultural identity. Graham Seal’s

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Last Words’, The Bombshell, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> A. Melling, ‘Wartime opportunities : Ladies’ Football and the First World War Factories’, *European Sports History Review*, Volume 5, pp. 120-141.

<sup>16</sup> G. Seal, *The Soldiers’ Press* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. ix.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Warr, *Sheffield’s Great War and Beyond*, p. 87.



analysis of trench journals will be examined in this chapter to demonstrate the role misinformation and rumour can have in a magazine. Exploring Seal's evidence on the trench journals also provides notions of identity that would appear among the different regiments. How workers would distinguish their own work from others through humour, literature or sport will be addressed regarding *The Bombshell* throughout the thesis.

Chapter two will explore how *The Bombshell* would portray women in the Templeborough factory. Women were proving that they could perform the same tasks as men but would they be treat as equals? The first half of this chapter will examine attitudes expressed in *The Bombshell* that it was expected women would return to their former roles once the war was over. Evidence in the magazine will also be scrutinised to assess if material would support or challenge these attitudes. The second half of the chapter will examine evidence in the magazine to assess how a new workforce could be managed. Exploring material by Angela Woollacott, Anne Spurgeon, and Penny Summerfield among others, will help to place into context how the female workforce would be monitored. Marion Kozak's unpublished thesis, *Women Munitions Workers during the First World War*, will be examined to explore notions of paternalism in *The Bombshell* such as women's sporting events, in order to further promote respectability and conformity among the female workers.

Chapter three will examine the way humour was portrayed in *The Bombshell* drawing on Lucy Delap's investigation into domestic service humour. *The Bombshell* would unify the employees by acknowledging most staff were experiencing similar difficulties during the war. Rationing and concerns about family members overseas among other anxieties were common place and *The Bombshell* would try and assist in keeping morale high. There was no better way *The Bombshell* achieved this than the tongue-in-cheek humour that was often so prevalent in the *Trench Journals*. Among the tongue-in-cheek jests at other workers; (foremen often bearing the brunt of many jokes), was the popular column *Things We Want to Know*. The fact that this title, or variations of it appeared in other in-house journals suggested that it was not only a popular theme but had originated from elsewhere and will be investigated by returning to Spears work on humour and gossip in the *Trench Press*. This chapter will also investigate how humour can lead the historical enquiry into exploring themes such as welfare in the workplace as it was often parodied in *The Bombshell*. Along with Noel Whiteside's study into World War One industrial welfare, Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield's research will be used to further explore the notion of welfare and how it was accessed and portrayed.

Chapter four will analyse examples of a selection of the stories and poetry submitted and will examine how some of the songs and verses would display solidarity and patriotic notions among the women workers. For some this would be the first time they would ever see their work in print, whilst for others it was an opportunity to show off their talents as they would frequently supply

The Bombshell with regular content. Staff would present sketches on life in the factory with hints of romance but these never took themselves too seriously. There were displays of camaraderie in the workplace, which one would expect to witness, yet there were also displays of the grittiness of the work as shown in the story/auto-biographical account, Tool-Setting in a Northern Factory. Although often presented in skits, war weariness also began to appear in The Bombshell and more sombre material would remind the reader that a war was still being waged. This chapter will bring to a close the run of The Bombshell at Templeborough as the war came to an end.

The final chapter will examine if the content of The Bombshell would remain the same now the magazine was being published in peacetime and if it would still reflect the interests of the workforce. The end of the war would signify that the factory at Templeborough and its predominantly female workforce were no longer needed. The Bombshell had not originally intended to continue after the war but it had 'made a name for itself' and would 'continue to be issued at the Norfolk Works' of Thos. Firth and Sons.<sup>19</sup> This will be performed by succinctly re-examining the themes in the previous chapters to determine if any changes would occur in the content of the magazine. For instance, content will be examined to explore how much women would continue to be mentioned in the magazine, not only by acknowledging their previous roles but also to ascertain if women's sport would also continue to be mentioned as it had been proudly displayed before. Humour had played a big part in the content of the magazine in order to keep spirits high and material will be explored to assess if this would remain to be the status quo or if humour would diminish with a change of content. Stories, poems and other contributions will also be examined to ascertain if the content would continue to be written by the employees and reflect the interests of the workforce. The Bombshell had displayed itself as a flagship magazine for the company but after the war readership there appeared to be a decline in sales. This chapter will explore why this had happened and how the management would approach the issue of maintaining interest in the magazine.

Finally this thesis will conclude that exploring themes within the content of The Bombshell, will enable the reader to develop an appreciation of how munitions workers were, not only represented by others, but by themselves. Examining The Bombshell as a metaphorical window will enable the reader to place the munitions magazine in a wider historical context and may assist further studies into company magazines and how workers were represented.

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<sup>19</sup> 'The Last Word of the Editor', The Bombshell, Vol. 2, No. 9, November 1918, p. 52.

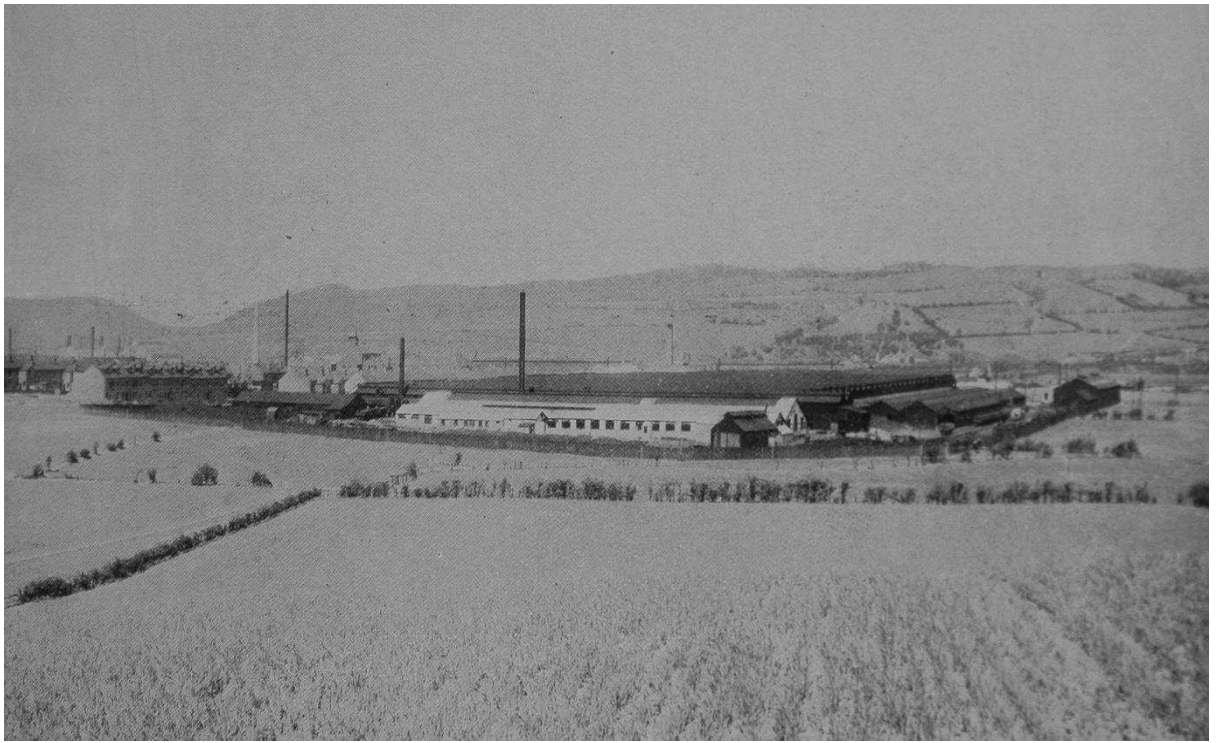


Fig. 1. The Templeborough National Projectile Factory.<sup>20</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

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<sup>20</sup> The Bombshell, Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1919, p. 247.

## Chapter 1

### A Metaphorical Window – Examining the Company Magazine

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries companies increasingly began to use the medium of company magazines to further connect with their workforce. The company magazine, or in-house journal, as it is also often known, can be of great value to the historian, not only in a historical business or media context but by examining the magazine to appreciate the cultural aspect of its workforce. The magazine reveals how new facilities such as welfare provision or health and safety that have been introduced for staff are implemented, whilst exploring how the daily politics of a large workforce can be managed through aspects of company paternalism. Examining the magazine can also help to assess how workers have helped to contribute to the company magazine and how this may have helped to cement positive relations between employer and employee.

Michael Heller states that ‘little research has been carried out on how these institutions used media ... in relation to creating relations with internal and external audiences.’<sup>1</sup> He pronounces the company magazine ‘as much media texts as they were business artefacts and... should be examined as both.’<sup>2</sup> Heller argues there is a wider historical context of media that should be acknowledged when examining company magazines. This thesis will explore the historical context of *The Bombshell* as it was produced at a time of war, and was provided for a workforce that was unique. The publication year of 1919 will also be examined to explore any continuities or changes that would occur in the magazine. The chapter will examine how the content was implemented to connect with both internal and external sources whilst acknowledging the culture of the magazine.

#### Approaches

In order to study and assess the content of *The Bombshell*, this thesis will utilise the model of investigation John Curran implements when studying media history. Curran argues, there are, in media history, ‘six interpretations: the liberal, feminist, popularist, the libertarian, the anthropological and the radical.’<sup>3</sup> The radical interpretation views the texts ‘as an attempt to control employees’ or ‘as a medium for workers to express themselves within the organisation.’<sup>4</sup> The popularist interpretation could be used ‘to track the content’ of the magazine.<sup>5</sup> The feminist

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<sup>1</sup> M. Heller, ‘British Company Magazines, 1878-1939: The Origins and Functions of House Journals in Large-Scale Organisations’, *Media History*, Vol. 15 No. 2 (2009), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

interpretation may assist in examining ‘representations of women and gender within the organisation.’<sup>6</sup> Finally, the anthropological interpretation could be applied in order to examine ‘corporate identity and organisational culture.’<sup>7</sup> This thesis will utilise the majority of the interpretations that Curran presents though some may be applied more than others. For example, as the workforce was predominantly female, the feminist interpretation will be applied when focussing on women in the work place.

John Griffiths' analysis of culture in company journals, prior to the First World War, pays attention to facets which should also be considered when regarding the company journal as historically significant. These facets include investigating how the in-house magazine communicates with the company's workforce by developing ‘a combination of quantitative and qualitative research strategies in order to operationalise the study of corporate culture.’<sup>8</sup> This thesis will examine the complete run of *The Bombshell* throughout the First World War up to December 1919 to include an analysis of the content of *The Bombshell* after the war. A wide selection of material will also be examined and presented in order to fully analyse the content of the magazine, providing a qualitative approach.

Griffiths acknowledges that it is common for historians, who wish to examine ‘the recent history of a company’, to utilise oral histories when investigating ‘assumptions and beliefs that were held at a particular time.’<sup>9</sup> He recognises there is a problem however that, ‘unless interviews which have been conducted in the past and stored, oral history will not be available for earlier periods of a company's history.’<sup>10</sup> The company magazine, he argues, can prove beneficial to shedding some light on the culture of the company by viewing ‘the magazine as a cultural artefact which can cast light on a changing organisational culture.’<sup>11</sup> Not only is the company magazine a cultural artefact, as Griffiths claims, but as Heller notes (and this is certainly true of *The Bombshell*), ‘the development of the media is a historical phenomenon which cannot be divorced from the society within which it is embedded.’<sup>12</sup> This is reflected by acknowledging ‘the number of weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines’ which had grown ‘from 643 in 1875 to 2531 in 1903.’<sup>13</sup> The escalating growth in magazines, Heller believes, is linked to ‘the emergence of the company journal.’<sup>14</sup> Magazines were becoming ‘often lighter in style’ and began to cater ‘for a wide range of segments from men, women and children, to sports leisure and hobbies’ which would soon be

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> J. Griffiths, ‘Exploring Corporate Culture: The potential of company magazines for the business historian’, *Business Archives*, Vol. 78 (1999), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Heller, op. cit, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

replicated in many in-house journals.<sup>15</sup> Although sports news featured heavily in company journals, short stories, poetry, book and travel reviews all began to make regular appearances.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note at this initial stage that both Heller and Griffiths have not truly distinguished between the company magazine and the in-house journal. Both are, it appears, conceding that they are a similar publication, yet some differ in content. Some company magazines would promote news of the company as an official magazine to inform other suppliers of their progress and successes, whilst others would often serve and promote the combined interests of both the employee and employer. Occasionally a company magazine would attempt a combination of both, displaying the progress of the company to customers whilst boasting the achievements of its workforce to the employees' families, communicating both internally and externally.

Academics debate the origin of culture within the company. Griffiths proposes that there are two main schools of thought.<sup>17</sup> The first, he argues, is 'that a company "has" a culture' which 'is usually the creation of the founder of the business... [and] can be manipulated.'<sup>18</sup> The second school of thought, he claims, 'suggests the company "is" a culture.'<sup>19</sup> Falling into the latter school of thought Lynn Meek observes, 'Leaders do not create culture, it emerges from the collective social interaction of groups or communities.'<sup>20</sup> It is arguable that, whilst leaders cannot create culture, as Meek suggests, they can manipulate what culture is represented through censorship or suppression, (an example of which can be seen in the evidence below concerning The Firth Worker.) Andrew Pettigrew also falls into the second school of thought suggesting 'that the important categories for studying such phenomena are language, ideology, ritual, myth, legend, symbol and saga.'<sup>21</sup> Both language and ritual will be explored in the chapter regarding literature, as prose was often repeated and adapted to suit the purpose of the authors. The proposal of the in-house journal may have rested with the managers of the company but the magazine reflected the culture of life inside the factory, and those who worked within it, whilst proving a vital tool of communication between employer and employee.

#### Placing The Bombshell in context.

Griffiths, investigating the rites and rituals of company life of the Lever Bros, describes their in-house journal 'as an important medium to communicate with the Lever Brothers workforce.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>17</sup> Griffiths, op. cit, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> J. Griffiths, 'Give my Regards to Uncle Billy. . . ' The Rites and Rituals of Company Life at Lever Brothers, c. 1900-c. 1990, Business History, Vol. 37 (4), (1995), p. 28.

Beginning in 1895, the Port Sunlight Monthly Journal took on many forms over the years. Originally written for academic purposes it began to endeavour ‘to devote certain space to notice of local events’ and ‘inform its readers on all happenings in the district.’<sup>23</sup> Griffiths suggests that the Port Sunlight Monthly Journal and its successors, Square Deals and Progress (1899) and the Port Sunlight News, presents the historian with ‘a metaphorical ‘window’ through which the outsider can observe a past business community's culture.’<sup>24</sup>

In 1953 the publication *The Story of Port Sunlight* was distributed to the workforce and considered Port Sunlight ‘as a huge family’.<sup>25</sup> This idea of an amicable relationship between employer and employee was developed from a very early stage at Port Sunlight and would later be replicated in *The Bombshell* and similar publications. Confirming this amiable bond, Griffiths acknowledges that ‘Lever's philosophy was that the interests of employers and employees were identical.’<sup>26</sup> John Child remarks that improving human relations was very much at the forefront of some employers’ interests, especially Quaker companies. He states that many benevolent schemes devised by companies, for their employees, were done in order to ensure ‘that their own employees benefitted from good conditions of work.’<sup>27</sup>

Some of the benevolent schemes devised would ‘improve employees standards of living and culture’, whilst others would explore ‘labour management policies oriented towards increasing efficiency as well as human well-being.’<sup>28</sup> Child also acknowledges that whilst campaigners, such as Robert Owen, had insisted that ‘welfare’ paid material dividends, ‘there was little scientific evidence for this until the physiological experiments in munitions factories during the First World War.’<sup>29</sup> Port Sunlight News also extended to the employee’s family which was ‘demonstrated by the inclusion of both a ladies’ page and a children’s page.’<sup>30</sup> Similarly, *The Bombshell* was devoted to the interests of its employees, and displayed the occasional article on garment cutting or recipes for the women workers, though this was more to do with demonstrating how to be economical at a time of war.

*The Bombshell* was not the only in-house journal of Thomas Firth & Sons during the war. In June 1917 the shop committee, representing the interests of the workers, ‘decided to issue a paper (as an antidote to the one [*The Bombshell*] issued by the firm) for circulation among the employees.’<sup>31</sup> The paper, *The Firth Worker*, published fortnightly, proved popular and it was decided, in order to meet the huge demand, to issue a second paper, *The Sheffield Worker*, which

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> J. Child, *British Management Thought* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> J. Griffiths, ‘Give my Regards to Uncle Billy’, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> *The Firth Worker: The Organ of Firth’s Workers’ Committee*, No. 16, 1918, p. 9.

made its first appearance in December 1917.<sup>32</sup> The aims of The Sheffield Worker were to encourage communication between the existing shop committees and to 'educate the rank and file to take a much wider outlook on industrial matters.'<sup>33</sup>

Among its articles, there is very little evidence of news of sports or social events, The Firth Worker expressed growing anti-war feelings, often found in the content of the article 'Is it a Fact?' a take on The Bombshell's Things We'd Like To Know. Though much of this regular column was humorous, questions could still be found which were socialist in tone such as asking if it was a fact 'THAT the Engineers' Shop is beginning to make itself heard' and 'Is it a fact THAT the workers are not satisfied, and intend to reverse the decision.'<sup>34</sup> The magazine also published articles discussing strikes and asking women workers if they had realised they were being exploited with low rates of pay. The latter article stated 'there is no reason why they [the women] should not have received the same wages for the same work as the men.'<sup>35</sup>

In its 16th issue the magazine presented an article titled "Gagged". The article explained that the authorities were preventing any further publications of the paper being made without a procured licence 'under an order made in November, 1917.'<sup>36</sup> The magazine further commented that the Committee had applied for a licence but noted 'beyond an acknowledgement nothing further has been heard of the matter.'<sup>37</sup> With The Sheffield Worker being suppressed, The Firth Worker was now in even more demand than before. The article expounded that the committee had met with authorities fearing that this paper may also be suppressed. No objection was made to The Firth Worker continuing its publication, it noted, quite the opposite. The local authority 'were prepared to recommend that a licence should be granted' but it was subsequently discovered that an order dated June 1917 prohibited 'such a paper.'<sup>38</sup> The Firth Worker was suppressed in July 1918. The paper would continue after the war but under the new title of The Worker. Its socialist undertones would also remain with articles regarding 'Setting Class Against Class' and 'Employers' Hypocrisy'.<sup>39</sup> It was evident with the publication of The Firth Worker that there were grievances within the firm but publishing these would not be in the interests of unifying the workers. The Bombshell would be a very different vehicle of communication, one which the management could control.

The Bombshell intended for its workforce to have a voice in the company magazine that would serve as a medium and (whilst ultimately hoping to dispel any hostilities between the male and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., No. 8, 1918, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Worker, No. 18, p. 1 and 3.



female workers) help demonstrate that the work force at the Templeborough factory was a happy and productive one. Heller notes that this was evident when there were several branches and stations in which staff at Port Sunlight were dispersed. Staff journals, he claims, ‘were seen as a solution’ which could contend with ‘the need of some unifying force.’<sup>40</sup> These sentiments are often expressed in many editorials of in-house journals. Heller remarks that ‘in the opening editorial of the Great Eastern Railway Magazine in 1911’, the editor notes, ‘It is our aim to knit the loose connecting strands of casual intercourse into a closer net of continuous communications, to strengthen the bond of friendship and promote a feeling of unity throughout the service.’<sup>41</sup>

A feeling of unity was never more evidently needed than during the First World War, especially for those serving in the army. Whilst issues of *The Bombshell* may have been dispatched to overseas soldiers by their loved ones, the soldiers had already instigated creating their own journals with which they could find a common voice. Trench journals had become hugely popular and, as early as 1917, it was recognised that they would be “invaluable to all collectors of war-material...to record curiosities of every description.”<sup>42</sup> The numerous titles included; *Whizzy Bang: Monthly Organ of the Durham Light Infantry*; *Iodine Chronicle*, *Forty-Niner*, *R.M.R. Growler*, *Twentieth Gazette*, *Vics. Patrol Trench Echo*, *The Listening Post*, *Dead Horse Corner Gazette*, *Now and Then*, *The Brazier*. viz.: *The Pow-Wow*, *The Leadswinger*, *The Minden Magazine*, *The Gasper* and *The Quaysider: Organ of & Company 9th Northumberland Fusiliers*.<sup>43</sup> Sir J. W. Fortescue, Librarian to H.M. the King, complained:

“Scores of them [journals], possibly hundreds, spring up and then become suddenly extinct. One day they appear to possess a firm and solid existence, on the next a battalion is annihilated and the sheet is dead. I fear that many of these journals may have escaped my notice, and will hence forth remain undiscoverable and unobtainable for the King's Library.”<sup>44</sup>

The trench journals often provided a much needed medium for the soldiers to convey their frustrations, as well as being a conduit for news, gossip and parodies. With soldiers receiving little or unreliable information, especially from newspapers and personal mail, rumour played a part within the trench journals, fulfilling a need for ‘communication and information.’<sup>45</sup> Often conveyed with tones of dark humour, rumours were habitually presented in the section typically known as ‘*Things we’d like to know*’. A format of this section was frequently replicated in later

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<sup>40</sup> Heller, op. cit, p. 149.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> F. T. W. Lange, Notes on War Literature, *The Library World*, Vol. 19, No. 11 (1917), p. 284.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Seal, op. cit, p. 6.

in-house journals, including *The Bombshell*, and will be discussed in further detail in chapter three.

Seal argues that while trench journals may provide the reader with an insight into some of the experiences of trench life, they also served as a vessel which allowed the soldiers 'to go beyond simply coping with what they had been dealt and to state a position of their own.'<sup>46</sup> Therefore, he argues, the trench journals, perhaps unintentionally, conveyed the experiences of soldiers to a 'vital secondary readership' consisting 'of politicians, the mainstream press, military commanders and the civilian population of family, friends... and workmates.'<sup>47</sup> *The Bombshell* also enjoyed a much wider audience than originally anticipated, albeit unintentionally. As previously stated, copies of the magazine were often sent to men serving overseas who would write back appreciatively urging their supplier, often a family member, to send more copies. *The Bombshell* was also forwarded to Buckingham Palace and other persons of significance who sent acknowledgement of its receipt. 'I am commanded by the Queen,' wrote the Queen's Private Secretary, 'to thank you very much for the copy of "*The Bombshell*"... which you have been kind enough to send for Her Majesty's acceptance.'<sup>48</sup> Similarly, F. L. Stephenson's letter was published in the magazine's letter page a month later; 'The Prime Minister desires me to thank you', he wrote, 'for your courtesy in sending him a copy of the New Year Number of your works magazine, "*The Bombshell*".'<sup>49</sup>

Company magazines were not created solely to stamp an identity of the workforce, many of them also served to convey information to the workforce. *The Bombshell* assisted in portraying to the new employee an ideal of how to operate in a working environment, where rules and regulations were strict and good relations needed to be encouraged for a harmonious working environment. Sport also helped to demonstrate how affirmative attitudes should be displayed both on and off the shop floor and sporting events were frequently reported in *The Bombshell*. Using the company magazine to inform the workforce is, claims Heller, 'an attempt to construct' organisational culture.<sup>50</sup> He clarifies this construction as being 'defined as a system of shared values, norms, practices and basic assumptions.'<sup>51</sup> Examples of admonitions in *The Bombshell*, surrounding inefficiency and laziness, primarily aimed at the women workers, will be explored in the next chapter. The practical advantage of organisation culture is, admits Heller, that 'through its ingrained system of values and practices, it aids employees, especially when working in groups, in making decisions and carrying out work tasks.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> 'Our Letter Bag', *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p43.

<sup>49</sup> 'Our Letter Bag', *The Bombshell*, February, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 12, p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Heller, op. cit, p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Heller states that one of the factors behind the rise of the company journal from 1914-39 'was the beginning of serious academic study and debate, which became known as the 'human relations' movement'.<sup>53</sup> Increasingly popular during the First World War, the movement 'emphasised that the workplace was as much a social centre as it was one of economic [and munitions] production'.<sup>54</sup> Debates could often be found amidst the pages of journals, offering reflective thought and tales of journey abroad, encountering other cultures. Whilst the debates had their place within the company magazine, Heller agrees that 'the dispersal of information was a central facet'.<sup>55</sup> There was no alternate way to better deliver information to the employees on changes within the workplace. 'Pensions, sick pay, holidays, canteens, and sports and leisure activities' were all discussed in the boundaries of the journal.<sup>56</sup> This was no more evident than with *The Bombshell* which would desire to train and inform its new workforce as soon as possible. Supervisors could only devote so much of their time to training new staff and informing them of company policies. The provision of welfare was also often discussed within the pages of the company journal. Whilst welfare benefitted 'the organisation by providing healthier, motivated and more educated workers', part of the culture of the magazine was to poke fun at provisions, more noticeably, the company canteen, as will be presented in chapter three.<sup>57</sup>

Though company magazines often differed in content, many would share the same intentions and proposals. Whilst not a works magazine, *The Landswoman Magazine* was a publication which possessed similar aims and goals and sought to combine the interests of those working on the land. First published in 1918, its intention was to bind members into 'one big family'.<sup>58</sup> Each monthly edition was 16 pages in length and featured news articles, technical articles regarding farm work, correspondence, competitions and advertisements.<sup>59</sup> The magazine welcomed contributions from members in the form of short stories, poetry and photographs.<sup>60</sup> Seeking 'to counter prejudices and stereotypes still held by farmers about women's abilities to work on the land' the magazine helped to reinforce 'Land Girls' minds that their labours were highly valuable to the nation.<sup>61</sup> This is comparable to the interests of the soldiers who, Seal acknowledges, wished to state a position of their own. In many respects *The Landswoman Magazine* is also similar to *The Bombshell*, which, devoted to the interests of the workers, helped to reinforce the value of women's labour in the munitions factory.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>58</sup> C. Watton, *The Women's Land Army*. [online]. Last updated April, 2014, <http://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/archive-material/the-landswoman-magazine-ww1/>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

The company magazine also provided information that would regularly dispel myths and rumours that could have caused unrest or concern among workers. The company magazine would also often display solidarity with the workforce in its tone and contemplative pieces which will be examined in chapter four. Even magazines such as *The Landswoman Magazine*, which was not factory based, helped to deliver information that would help create and reinforce relationships between workers whilst assisting them to stamp their own identity in society. The company magazine was a companion to the worker whilst absorbing the reader in its culture.

One concluding observation Heller provides in his study of company magazines was that ‘the magazines entertained and amused their readers.’<sup>62</sup> If this had not been the case, it is difficult to ascertain if the magazines could maintain their popularity. Heller remarks that the ‘magazines fully embraced... popular culture’, often including reviews on holidays, literature, music and even the cinema.<sup>63</sup> This chapter has provided examples by Griffiths and Heller of what is known about company magazines. It also acknowledges the approaches that will be used in examining evidence in *The Bombshell* to present the metaphorical window that can assist in helping to understand the company magazine as a cultural artefact.

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<sup>62</sup> Heller, op. cit, p. 157.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two

### More than Munitions –Women in the Workplace

Deborah Thom effectively summarises the difficult job that *The Bombshell* was presented with in trying to unite a new workforce. She explains that ‘the culture of the workplace... and of war factory mass production itself emphasised the separateness of the workers from everyday concerns and was peculiar to wartime.’<sup>1</sup> Thom continues to describe the added problem that ‘the rhythms of work, the nature of the training on the job, the social relations of the workplace were all altered by the fact that the work was undertaken by women who were addressed, in a threefold description, as women war-workers.’<sup>2</sup> *The Bombshell*’s ambition was problematic, to paint a picture of a happy, productive and predominantly female workforce pulling together at a time of war. A new in-house magazine for a new factory would hopefully dispel any hostilities, especially between the sexes. In the very first issue, the editor remarked:

‘Of one thing I am sure – that in retrospect these days which have brought so many of the women of England among sights and scenes never dreamed of into an atmosphere of grub screws, and C Spanners and Cutting Compound and..... trousers - will take upon themselves in after years a glamour and romance all of their own.’<sup>3</sup>

Yet as Lucy Delap has noted, time can possibly change the perception of the reader to perhaps review evidence with a much more critical eye as times and attitudes change. One overtly harsh, but scarce, example towards women can be found in the ‘Famous Sayings’ section. ‘It is my considered opinion,’ the writer stated, ‘that wife-beating will only be stamped out when women are beaten regularly and severely before they become wives.’<sup>4</sup> Whilst this section was usually intended to be humorous, it is impossible for the modern reader to comprehend how the remark could possibly be printed.

The aims of this chapter are twofold. First, evidence in *The Bombshell* will be explored to investigate both the laudatory and, sometimes unintentional, derogatory remarks towards women in the workplace. Angela Woollacott notes that ‘when women first entered male-dominated engineering factories... they were met with a variety of responses from coolness to curiosity.’<sup>5</sup> Articles and letters in *The Bombshell* often congratulated the female workers throughout the war yet there remained evidence of condescending undertones. George Robb confirms that whilst women were praised ‘for their work’ they were also ‘the subjects of gossip, parody, and censure

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<sup>1</sup> D. Thom, ‘“A Revolution in the Workplace?” Women’s Work in Munitions Factories and Technological Change 1914-1918’ in deGroot, G. , & Schrover, M. , eds. *Women Workers and Technological Change* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> S. McKenna, ‘Sonia’, *The Bombshell*, February, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 12 (Imperial War Museum, Duxford: E. 94/1), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend* (London, 1994), p. 201.

whenever their behaviour seemed too unconventional.’<sup>6</sup> Attitudes began to be formulated on ‘setting limits on what women should do and defining how they should behave’ both outside and inside the workplace.<sup>7</sup> Evidence in *The Bombshell*, presented in this chapter, will demonstrate that, even as the workforce became accustomed to one another at the Templeborough factory, there remained the notion that, once the war was over, the female workforce would return to their roles in the home. These concepts of separate spheres, which were only temporarily merged during the war, are prevalent in material throughout *The Bombshell*, and defined views of respectability, class and sometimes technical and intellectual ability. Whilst *The Bombshell*’s aim was to treat the workforce as one big, happy family, it would be a family that would be reminded on how to behave.

The second aim of this chapter is to explore how *The Bombshell* portrayed the roles and extra-curricular activities of the workers whilst also addressing paternalistic notions of ‘moral supervision and instruction of the workforce’ by the factory.<sup>8</sup> When examining women’s roles in the First World War, Bob Holman argues that ‘it is usually overlooked that working-class women played an important role ensuring that the soldiers had adequate ammunition.’<sup>9</sup> Whilst this statement is correct, it is further overlooked that women in munitions factories also contributed to other activities. As this chapter will demonstrate, evidence in *The Bombshell* displays that women were also involved in galas, fetes and sporting events held by the Firm. Friendly sports matches were organised between shop floors and often other factories and were either celebrated or commiserated upon in *The Bombshell*, depending on the outcome. Many of the activities helped to raise money for the firm’s war fund and were displayed proudly in the magazine exhibiting that the Templeborough workforce were contributing in more ways than one. Holman also places an emphasis on working-class women, ignoring the fact that middle-class women also entered the factories in order to ‘do their bit’, with many taking on the roles of welfare supervisors and forewomen. Adding context to the chapter, these roles are addressed by Kozak and Spurgeon who also explore the notions of paternalism that were prominent in the factory. Conduct was equally as ‘important as a separate qualification for work’, remarks Kozak, and will be examined in further detail.<sup>10</sup>

Woollacott states that ‘as the novelty of women workers wore off... tensions lessened but never disappeared.’<sup>11</sup> Women would often be met with both verbal and physical abuse.<sup>12</sup> By the time

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<sup>6</sup> G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A. Spurgeon, ‘Mortality or Morality? Keeping Workers Safe in the First World War’ in M. Andrews, & J. Lomas, eds. *The Home Front in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2014), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> B. Holman, [2015] Why we should remember the First World War’s female munitions workers. [online] *The Guardian*, 6 January.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kozak, ‘Women Munitions Workers during the First World War’, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Hull (1976), p. 267.

<sup>11</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 201-202.

<sup>12</sup> Thom, op. cit, p. 109.

the Templeborough factory opened in 1917 countless men would still perceive women's employment 'as encroachment on their territory.'<sup>13</sup> This attitude spurred on many women workers who 'were determined to perform wartime munitions jobs to the best of their abilities.'<sup>14</sup> Ms. E. Vaughan-Smith remarked in 1917: 'Women have shown during the war years that they can do nearly everything that men do.'<sup>15</sup> One female worker reminisced her time working as a tool fitter, describing some of the attitudes from male workers towards her:

'As a Demonstrator Operative...I was to establish the fact, for the benefit to foreman [sic] and tool-room hands, that a woman was capable of doing skilled work. It was a position fraught with considerable nerve strain as the manager and foreman only knew my real position... Over and over again the foreman gave me wrong or incomplete directions and altered them in such a way as to give me hours more work.'<sup>16</sup>

On beginning a new job at a different factory, the female tool fitter found similar attitudes towards her as a skilled worker. She was informed by two shop stewards on her first day that as long as she received 'the full men's rate of pay (1/3 an hour)' there would be no objection to her working there.<sup>17</sup> This was not reflected in the behaviour of her co-workers;

'After this none of the men spoke to me for a long time, and would give me no help as to where to find things. My drawer nailed up by the men, and oil was poured over everything in it through a crack another night.'<sup>18</sup>

Although Woollacott states, 'it is impossible to estimate how prevalent... harassment was', evidence can be found on closer inspection.<sup>19</sup> In the first issue of *The Bombshell* experiences similar to the ones presented above can be found in a parody of the poem 'If'. Whilst the poem stated that women as forewomen could achieve respect in the work place, there would be various challenges they would be faced with. The one line of the poem that resonates the most with those of the file cutter is 'If, you can bear to have all your tools taken each day and never stop to curse the thief,' reiterating that attitudes had not changed that much by 1917.<sup>20</sup> The poem also hints that relationships between the sexes were not as diplomatic as *The Bombshell* liked to portray. This was no clearer than in the line, 'If you can keep the Foreman and Machine girls at peace with each

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<sup>13</sup> P. Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', *The International History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1997) p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> E. Vaughan-Smith, 'What is Women's Work?' *Quiver*, Vol. 53. No. 1. (Nov, 1917), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> A. Marwick, *Women at War* (Glasgow, 1977), p. 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 202.

<sup>20</sup> 'If', *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 9.

one of your chosen few,' which displayed that relationships between workers were far from harmonious.<sup>21</sup>

The same issue displayed attitudes towards women's abilities in the workplace. The article, 'A Psychological Problem', attempted to give a humorous explanation of the way in which women performed their duties yet exhibited undertones of women being inferior to men, not only in the work place.<sup>22</sup> The article commented;

'It is... a striking fact to notice in the various spheres of labour that women are now filling, how their inherent humours and fancies are in constant rebellion against the well-considered and effective rules of masculine discipline.'<sup>23</sup>

The article explained that 'a male person in authority is of the well-considered opinion that a certain piece of work should be done in a certain way, and says so to a woman worker.'<sup>24</sup> It noted that women were in rebellion to this idea and that 'her subconscious mind... is jarred by the thought that his way is not her way, and proceeds to do it her way.'<sup>25</sup> The article was not claiming that women were strong-willed but obstinate when it likened women workers to children. 'She cannot be blamed,' it remarked, 'because... just as we put up with charming... children and love them for their vagaries and their dependency, their fanciful humours and whimsical charms, so we love her.'<sup>26</sup> The article ended with, 'God Bless all our women.'<sup>27</sup> The commentary attempted to show support for integrating women workers into the workforce, yet it displayed women's innovativeness as childish behaviour. Summerfield notes that 'work was still differentiated by gender and women were still treated as subordinate in status to men.'<sup>28</sup> The differences between the two sexes was also pointed out, perhaps as a warning to foremen to be cautious when criticising work. 'Women,' commented the editorial of one issue of *The Bombshell*, 'require to be treated in many cases quite differently from men when their work is criticised, and many men who during their business career have had a male staff to deal with until now, have learnt the lesson to their cost.'<sup>29</sup> This editorial was more notable for its warning when criticising women as it was written by a woman welfare officer.

There existed a notion that a certain level of intelligence was required for women workers at Templeborough, regardless of class. A request for work, real or fictitious, it is unclear, was

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> 'A Psychological Problem', *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Summerfield, op. cit, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> 'A Word of Encouragement', *The Bombshell*, August, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 6, p. 11.



published in *The Bombshell*, perhaps to demonstrate the kind of applicant that would be unwelcome at Templeborough. The request began; 'I... have the pleasure of writing to you to ask you the Reason why I carnt [sic] get employment at your firm.'<sup>30</sup> The letter severely lacked punctuation and was consistently full of spelling errors. The applicant complained that she had visited the factory every morning only to be unsuccessful in acquiring any work, having being given 'the same old tale' of being too big for the uniform.<sup>31</sup> The woman admonished that 'Sir Ill tell you this much work isnt dealt out fair at all at Templebourogh kissing goes with favour I am one that's proved it and I think it is a shame when you are willing to [work] and carnt get it [sic].'<sup>32</sup> There seems to be no other reason to publish this letter other than a poor attempt of humour and a reminder that 'Work can only be performed by the mentally fit', which the works manager stated, was required in his foreword in the same issue.<sup>33</sup>

Yet women were proving themselves to be more than competent in working in munitions, among many other roles. One journalist expressed admiration for women munition workers in 1916; 'One might also think that the girls looked on the shining shell-cases as babies, so keen is their pride in turning out work as perfect as possible.'<sup>34</sup> This was never more resonating than when *The Bombshell* published a picture of one of the women workers with a shell in her arms, (see fig. 2). Claire Culleton notes that this would not be the only visual reference to women's sexuality in magazines as; 'Newspapers and magazines published during the Great War also hinted that women munitions workers were eking out their gender's destiny in the arsenals.'<sup>35</sup> The *Shell Magazine*, the *Leeds National Ordnance Factory* magazine, was among them, picturing 'a woman munitions worker seated beside a three- to four- foot shell' displaying that their work was 'both sexually-titillating and maternally-attractive.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 'A Written Application for Employment at N. P. F Templeborough,' *The Bombshell*, April, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> 'Foreword by the Works Manager,' *The Bombshell*, April, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>35</sup> C. Culleton, 'Gender-charged Munitions: The Language of World War 1 Munitions Reports,' *Women's Studies Int. Forum* (1988), Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

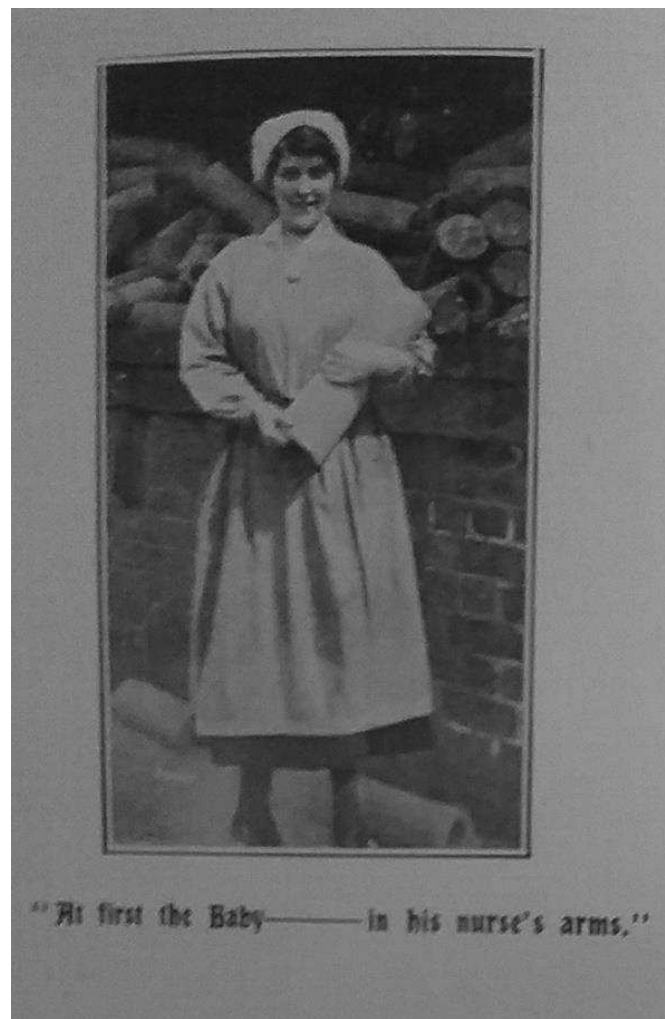


Fig. 2.<sup>37</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

Women could not escape the image of the domestic sphere, even at work. The *Bombshell* would often print articles on recipes and 'garment fitting', reminding women of their domestic roles at home. These appeals of 'effective domestic economy' notes Robb, seemed to ignore class differences since middle-class women had the leisure to experiment with new recipes.<sup>38</sup> Most working-class women workers also had to contend with 'rationing, queuing, and creative cookery' on top of their 'war work outside the home.'<sup>39</sup> Women's role in the home would also be compared to their role in the workplace. A small section was printed in *The Bombshell* claiming women's work machines had been found in a less than agreeable state, in comparison to 'a man's shop' which were left in a 'spruce condition for the oncoming turn.'<sup>40</sup> Their role in the home was questioned when the article stated 'It makes one think that a girl who leaves a dirty machine goes

<sup>37</sup> 'Love at Templeborough', *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Robb, op. cit, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> 'Cleanliness is Next to Efficiency', *The Bombshell*, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 22.

back to a dirty home.’<sup>41</sup> This was just one instance where there would be several ‘reminders’ in *The Bombshell* reproaching women when it was feared productivity was in peril.

Notices in *The Bombshell* reminded workers of the risks of being unproductive in their work. One article provided a fictitious account of two female workers as an example. The two girls, it noted, ‘should be at their machines ready to work, but... are discussing the latest hat.’<sup>42</sup> Note that the article is not only directed at female workers but demonstrates that the women could not be possibly discussing something more important than a hat. The article continued that by the time each worker were at their machines to begin work, they would have wasted a total of 30 minutes. This, in turn, would then be doubled to total an hour if ‘supposing a similar length of time is wasted at breakfast.’<sup>43</sup> The time was then calculated to show a loss of time and wages over the duration of one week remonstrating that the girls would have ‘6/- less in their pay bags and the output... down by 72 shells.’<sup>44</sup> The article concluded on a positive note stating ‘there are some operations in the shop where the girls pride themselves on working to the last minute of the shift and the oncoming shift are simply waiting to take their places... This is how it should be.’<sup>45</sup>

Whilst the above presented a fictional account, a second article in the same issue appeared regarding efficiency. The article asked ‘if the girls employed at Templeborough have ever given a thought to the large amount of trouble and time spent by management in trying to find out the best way to make the work easier and more pleasant for the workers.’<sup>46</sup> The article gave two accounts of inefficiency, both of which involved carelessness of the ‘girls’ before stating that ‘the girls can help the firm and themselves by being more careful...and create an efficient factory, and so help to win the war.’<sup>47</sup> Again, the article was addressing only female workers.

Attitudes towards women in the workplace were certainly paradoxical in *The Bombshell*. A letter sent in by a soldier, of one of the women workers’ husbands, who was fighting in the B.E.F in France, offered ‘A Retrospect and a Forecast.’<sup>48</sup> Q.M. Sergt. Ashton remarked;

‘The last three years have completely revolutionized the sexes... To-day our women folk are quite the equals of the opposite sex, intellectually, their minds are broadened, their strength of purpose and characters are undeniable.’<sup>49</sup>

Ashton then raised the question: ‘Realising the splendiddness of all they have done and are doing, recognising their magnificent courage and many sacrifices, are we satisfied? I think not.’<sup>50</sup> He

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Wasted Time means less Wages.’ *The Bombshell*, September, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 7, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Efficiency’, *The Bombshell*, September, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 7, p. 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> ‘A Retrospect and a Forecast’, *The Bombshell*, October, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

continued to forecast that men returning from the war would only be satisfied if they knew ‘our dear women folk be content to again take her natural place in the home... to care for and to comfort her man.’<sup>51</sup> If Ashton had not made himself clear enough, he concluded that men would believe that the war had been worthwhile ‘when they return home after a hard day’s work to find their evening meal made ready and their slippers warming on the fender,’ knowing the German despotism ‘could never again rear its awful head in the world.’<sup>52</sup> Ashton would also comment in a later issue, asking the ‘women-folk’ to ‘keep up the splendid ideals your boys have woven around you.’<sup>53</sup> This statement recaps the point to the women that it is a man’s role they are performing, and one that is temporary.

Women working and returning to the domestic sphere was discussed in the article *Whose World?* Written by ‘A Lady Journalist’, Lucy P., it raised questions regarding ‘reconstruction’ after the war.<sup>54</sup> The journalist asked that if the war was to continue for another three or four years, ‘how many sane, sound, young men will be left’ with young men being ‘scarce already – crippled, blinded and broken.’<sup>55</sup> She argued that whilst there was a considerable number of older men, the old men would soon be dead and the middle-aged men would soon be old. This would leave women who were ‘fit, sane, capable [and] trained’ a majority whilst men will ‘have shrunk to an almost negligible minority.’<sup>56</sup> She asked, ‘Will the new world be a woman's world?’<sup>57</sup> The journalist reflects on some of the accomplishments of women, not only through the war but before hostilities had begun. On women's duties during the war, she states; ‘It is difficult to see how marching with W.A.A.C.'s, making munitions, “guarding” trams, or even piloting taxis through dense traffic will make women yearn after pickle-and-jam making as a career.’<sup>58</sup>

Whilst the above article addressed aspects of women’s role after the war, there were still some women who believed that women would return to the domestic sphere once the war was over. Mrs Kay was among those who were ‘reluctantly compelled to remain in the quiet backwaters.’<sup>59</sup> She wrote thanking the women so far for their contribution, stating that they had ‘falsified... old time opinions.’<sup>60</sup> She conceded that ‘When the War is over, many [women] will be glad to return to the home life and the old sphere in which, after all, woman perhaps wields her highest influence.’<sup>61</sup> It is possible Mrs Kay did not perform many domestic duties herself in her home being the wife of the Works Manager. Even when trying to congratulate the behaviour of the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> ‘A New Year’s Message from the Front,’ *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Whose World?’ *The Bombshell*, October, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> ‘A Christmas Message’, *The Bombshell*, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

women in the workplace accounts could still sound patronising. One anonymous visitor congratulated women workers on their roles within the factory remarking, 'One cannot but pay tribute of admiration to the girls.'<sup>62</sup> The visitor continued:

'In pre-war days one would have been told that a factory full of girls would have needed an army of overseers to separate the combatants and remove the scattered hair-pins, teeth and tufts of torn-out hair. But no, all is orderly and the machine is the only thing that tries to drown out the voice.'<sup>63</sup>

There was not, perhaps, an army of overseers, instead, welfare officers were present to maintain good working relationships among the female workers. In order that women workers maximised their productivity, women welfare officers, also known as women welfare supervisors, were introduced to keep women workers in line as female supervisors were deemed more appropriate than male supervisors. It is important to acknowledge that it was intentional that most women welfare officers were middle-class as, it was assumed, 'their class background suited them to leadership.'<sup>64</sup> Whilst welfare provision such as restrooms, canteens and lavatories were appreciated by the workforce, 'many welfare supervisors... were not.'<sup>65</sup> Often inexperienced and untrained, the women welfare officers were usually 'the wives and relatives of managers who were able and willing to undertake their share of war work.'<sup>66</sup> There were occasions, Spurgeon confirms, where these 'largely untrained... supervisors seem to have over-interpreted their role.'<sup>67</sup> Often welfare officers, who 'were expected both to look after their charges' well-being and to control their behaviour', would come under criticism by other women workers.<sup>68</sup> However, there is little evidence of this in *The Bombshell*. If anything, the impression of the magazine was that welfare officers at Templeborough were held in admiration, though one would expect this to be so in a magazine that wanted to portray a happy and productive workforce.

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<sup>62</sup> 'A Visit to the N. P. F. ', *The Bombshell*, July, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 23-24.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Robb, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>66</sup> Kozak, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

<sup>67</sup> Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>68</sup> Robb, *op. cit.*, p. 45.



Fig. 3. A Group of the Workers' Representatives.<sup>69</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

Forewomen (also known as "Workers' Representatives"), were reported to 'have proved to be of great value in helping to remove any grievances which are felt to exist, in enabling the workers to discuss any matters which concern their welfare generally.'<sup>70</sup> When referring to workers, the description meant women workers. The male workers would report their own grievances to the foremen, though none of these would be witnessed in *The Bombshell* except possibly through skits and the column 'Things We Want to Know' as will be presented in the next chapter.

The Chief Welfare Supervisor at Templeborough was Mrs. Davies and a letter published in *The Bombshell* addressed to her conveyed some of the opinions that were held by ex-employees, who had been discharged and hired by other firms for various reasons. Signed from 'About Six of us "Who Know"', the ex-employees stated that they had felt compelled to write to *The Bombshell* after they had received 'such a rude awakening.'<sup>71</sup> They explained that not only were they homesick but 'we are never done talking about Firth's, and the girls are green with envy when we tell them about the lovely times we had there.'<sup>72</sup> It continued to report;

'It's about time somebody told you girls you are jolly lucky... Wait while you girls get the sack, and go working somewhere else... I hope they put this in "*The Bombshell*" as we want you all to see it. Very likely some of us thought we were very bad done to when we were there, but this has brought us to our senses.'<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup> 'Group of The Worker's Representatives', *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

The validity of this letter is dubious as it appears more as propaganda for good behaviour in the workplace and could have easily been manufactured by somebody in management. Mrs Davies, herself, would be awarded the M.B.E. and would later recount her visit to Buckingham Palace in *The Bombshell*, quite notably remarking to the male readers, ‘Men readers are asked to stop here and pass on to something else; this won’t interest them.’<sup>74</sup> Mrs Davies would eventually be ‘asked to attend before a War Cabinet Select Committee to give evidence on the Position of Women in Industry.’<sup>75</sup>

The monitoring of a female workforce, remarks Anne Spurgeon, helped to ensure ‘a standard of behaviour’ that the Ministry of Munitions had advised in 1915 to ‘attract women and girls into industry and... to reassure their parents.’<sup>76</sup> Penny Summerfield confirms there were fears that, as female workers adopted the uniform and overalls similar to their male counterparts, they may also adopt ‘manly characteristics and male patterns of behaviour: drinking, swearing, spending her earnings, and making sexual advances.’<sup>77</sup> As Margaret Brookes notes, for many women, working in the munitions factories also provided some with ‘their first – and sometimes last – experience of financial independence’ and it was ‘popular belief that munitions women were frivolously extravagant.’<sup>78</sup> Robb observes, ‘some people were full of indignation at women spending their war wages on fine apparel, going to pubs and cinemas, and dining out in restaurants.’<sup>79</sup> Not only did this seem ‘to go against the wartime spirit of austerity and self-sacrifice,’ he remarks, ‘but also reflected middle-class resentment of working-class upward mobility.’<sup>80</sup>

Many employees felt women workers needed to be supervised and realised that women would feel more comfortable being supervised by other women. This issue was ‘supported by the increasing number of concerns submitted to women inspectors by female workers over the years since 1893.’<sup>81</sup> The female welfare supervisors were, as Braybon and Summerfield acknowledge, ‘in an ambiguous position.’<sup>82</sup> Female welfare supervisors ‘were also encouraged to provide recreational and educational activities for employees outside working hours.’<sup>83</sup> These activities were presumed to offer ‘a diversion from other less desirable pursuits’, similar to the ones mentioned above, and, as Surgeon notes, can be interpreted as a form of ‘moral supervision and an instruction of the workforce.’<sup>84</sup> Recreational activities also helped to promote respectability.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., March, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Factory Memento’, *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup> Spurgeon, op. cit, p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> P. Summerfield, op. cit, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> M. Brooks, ‘Women in Munitions 1914-1918: The Oral Record’, *Imperial War Museum Review*, Vol. 5 (1990), p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> Robb, op. cit, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Spurgeon, op. cit, p. 62.

<sup>82</sup> G. Braybon, & P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage, Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, 1987) p. 88.

<sup>83</sup> Spurgeon, op. cit, p. 64.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

As Angela Woollacott acknowledges, women's factory-based pursuits 'enriched their working relationships and added multiple dimensions to their identities both as munitions workers... and as workers at their particular factory.'<sup>85</sup> This 'mantle of paternalism', Kozak remarks, had been adopted by the Government for the duration of the war.<sup>86</sup> The Government were 'emulating the good works of the Cadbury family at Bourneville and the Lever Brothers at Port Sunlight.'<sup>87</sup>

In addition to welfare-supervisors, policewomen were also assigned 'to supervise munitions areas and munitions factories.'<sup>88</sup> It was their role, with the cooperation of the welfare officers to patrol factory grounds in order 'to discourage "immorality", prevent "habitual loitering" or hiding from work.'<sup>89</sup> Whilst the policewomen were barely mentioned in *The Bombshell*, a photograph was exhibited in the very last edition, (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The Women Police of the National Projectile Factory, Templeborough.<sup>90</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

The aspect of separate spheres was also present when the factory decided to organise events such as the 'Christmas at Home' event on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1917.<sup>91</sup> The event was to host a Christmas celebration for '600 children of ages varying from three to seven, in addition to 150

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<sup>85</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 137.

<sup>86</sup> Kozak, op. cit, p. 264.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9.

<sup>91</sup> 'Factory News and Notes', *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 13.



wounded soldiers and about 2,000 of ourselves.’<sup>92</sup> Whilst some factory men readied for the occasion by organising speeches and lantern slide for the occasion, the women workers were involved in various roles from making sure the food was prepared to decorating the Christmas trees and ensuring all the arrangements for the children’s entertainment was completed. One of the few difficulties that were experienced in preparing for the event was the invitations that had been sent out. Some women workers had not declared their children in a census undertaken by female supervisors. This problem arose ‘owing to the absurd rumour that all married women in the Factory were to be dismissed.’<sup>93</sup> The article commented; ‘the success of our “At Home” shows, as Mr. Winder remarked, that we are “just a big, happy family”.’<sup>94</sup>

The Bombshell remarked on how popular the extracurricular activities were with its female workforce, football being one of the most prevalent sports that women participated in. ‘Who... would have dreamt two years ago,’ it asked in June 1917, ‘of women playing football?’<sup>95</sup> The article, written by the Editor, recognised: ‘In their great and determined effort to save their country, women have not only taken on to their shoulders the work of man, but his pastimes and recreations as well.’<sup>96</sup> The Editor acknowledged that not everyone would see women playing football favourably; ‘It is the opinion of some people that playing football destroys a woman’s chief charm – that elusive and indefinable quality which for want of a better word we call “femininity”.’<sup>97</sup> Associating the football ground to that of the shop floor he stated; ‘If we can learn to apply the rules of football and cricket outside the playing fields to the game of life,’ he remarked, ‘if we can “play the game” at our work as well as at our sport, then it will be worth, and more than worth any real or imaginary sacrifice of early Victorian ideals.’<sup>98</sup> Football was far from being the only extracurricular activity that women became involved with, though, as Jean Williams remarks, ‘munitions football was the most visible dimension to the women’s game.’<sup>99</sup> The Bombshell would later ask in 1918, ‘What is the chief thing the girls have learned in the past six months?’<sup>100</sup> Addressing the women workers, it stated;

‘You have been learning recently the meaning of the “sporting spirit.” When the N.P.F. Club was formed, it was not only with a view of obtaining recreation. Those who were so enthusiastic about its formation, foresaw that your play would have a wonderful effect upon your work, and if by playing football, hockey or any other game you can learn to approach your work in the same spirit

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Playing The Game’, The Bombshell, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> J. Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls? A History of Women’s Football in Britain* (London, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>100</sup> ‘On the Sporting Spirit’, The Bombshell, February, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 12, p. 37.

as you approach your play, the formation of the Sports Club will not have been in vain.’<sup>101</sup>

Simon Phillips grants that involvement in sport and leisure served ‘to create and develop sociability, emotional rewards and self or group identity.’<sup>102</sup> The Bombshell proudly reported, commented on and displayed photographs of the sporting activities of both male and female employees. Matches of football, cricket and hockey were held between shop departments and with other factories and helped to display the workforce’s sporting abilities. These friendly matches not only helped to create the rewards mentioned above but also aided in raising money for both local and national causes. A football match with the Baker’s Shell Factory at Rotherham raised funds and it was reported that ‘a good sum [of money] was handed over to the Rotherham Hospital.’<sup>103</sup> As Phillips notes, representing the company in sport ‘did not consist simply of technical ability but signified an awareness of the affirmative attitude to display.’<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 5. ‘B’ Shop Team.<sup>105</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

This ‘affirmative attitude’ was presented regularly in *The Bombshell*, and conveyed the importance of sporting culture at Templeborough. Sports were also celebrated in family events such as galas, organised by the factory, with one such event being held on the 28<sup>th</sup> July at the Bramhall Lane Cricket Ground.<sup>106</sup> This gala was one of the many factory related social activities that the Templeborough staff participated in. Described as ‘a complete success’, the day was an opportunity ‘for the men and women who took part in the sports to forget, for a few short hours,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> S. Phillips, *Industrial Welfare, Recreation and Retailing at Boots Pure Drug Company 1883-1945* (Ph. D. diss. Nottingham Trent University, 2003), p. 221.

<sup>103</sup> ‘D Shop v Baker’s Shell Factory’, *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup> Phillips, op. cit, p. 226.

<sup>105</sup> *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> *The Bombshell*, September, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 8.

all about shells and piece work, gauges and boring cutters.’<sup>107</sup> Among the activities were the men’s hundred yard sprint, the girls’ prettiest costume event, the girls’ skipping race, the women’s 100 yard skipping race with other events being for both sexes such as the 60 yards egg and spoon race, the sack race and the stone and bucket race.<sup>108</sup> The gala raised around £85 with 75 per cent being contributed ‘to a fund for the relief of hard cases among workers at the N.P.F., and 25 per cent to the N.P.F. Sports Club.’<sup>109</sup> Phillips notes that family events such as these helped to make the employees ‘feel part of a “family” culture.’<sup>110</sup>



Fig. 6. A Grand Gala.<sup>111</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

The paternalistic approach by the company had helped to integrate women into the factory, which was essential in ensuring high production of munitions. The Bombshell demonstrated that it had assisted in creating a compliant and happy workforce. Yet there were still displays of sexism, especially when productivity was low. As evidence has shown, women were often admonished

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> Phillips, op. cit, p. 228.

<sup>111</sup> The Bombshell, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 20.

in the magazine whilst the men were not. There also remained the opinion of some, including other women that once the war was over, women should return to their roles in the domestic sphere.

In the meantime, sporting events would help to ensure a sense of comradeship as well as creating and displaying attitudes of how to conduct oneself both in and outside of the workplace. While sports helped to contribute to a notion of family, the work itself was monotonous, full of potential dangers and involved long hours. Workers would require light relief on the shop floor to maintain high spirits. Whilst welfare such as canteens helped to provide adequate services for the workers it also served as a hub for gossip and humour. The Bombshell would prove an excellent conduit to inject humour into the lives of the workers and would serve to keep spirits high. The next chapter will explore how humour helped to bring cheer to the factory floor whilst also facilitating as a conduit for gossip and information.

## Chapter Three

### Suffering from Cheerfulness – Humour in The Bombshell

‘Individual cheerfulness is more infectious than influenza’, proclaimed the editorial of *The Bombshell*, in July, 1918.<sup>1</sup> ‘One cheerful person in a shop’, it declared, ‘has a remarkable influence on the whole.’<sup>2</sup> One of the initial aims of *The Bombshell* was ‘to discover buried talents of various kinds.’<sup>3</sup> The tone of the magazine would also ‘not be without its humorous side.’<sup>4</sup> Light relief would be welcomed in the new factory at Templeborough where the initial period would be one of flux and uncertainty with the work itself often ‘extremely unpleasant’ and would carry ‘risks to health.’<sup>5</sup> The magazine would help employees and employers make light of situations at work and parody much of what they experienced, assisting in easing relations not only between male and female workers but also between the workers on the shop-floor and the foreman and welfare officers who oversaw the workers.

Lucy Delap claims that investigating humour can allow ‘an expansion of... historical inquiry’, offering an additional cultural and emotional dimension to the subject.<sup>6</sup> Accounts of munition workers have often been utilised in the past to describe their working conditions or how they felt about the work they were involved with, just as some soldiers had written their own personal accounts from the trenches of the battlefields. Humour is not something often related to with regard to the First World War, but magazines from the Front such as *The Wipers Times* or *The Leadswinger* show that the war could be parodied, not by the press but by those who were truly experiencing it. Neither is humour something that is expected to be witnessed in a munitions factory. Yet, *The Bombshell* exhibits that the interaction between employees, routines and daily toil, all prompted opportunities where humour could be used to ease tensions. *The Bombshell* provided very little comedy which was directed at the war, with much of the intended humour focussing on life in the factory. Material which did parody the war mainly existed in literature, albeit little, and will also be examined in the third chapter. There were, however, some illustrations in *The Bombshell* that displayed humour towards the war, though as one can see from Fig. 7, these were borrowed from *Punch* and other publications.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Cheerfulness’, *The Bombshell*, July, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 5, (Imperial War Museum, Duxford: E. 94/1), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> ‘Foreword’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Marwick, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> L. Delap, ‘Kitchen Sink Laughter: Domestic Service Humour in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2010), p. 625.



Fig.7.<sup>7</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

The illustration in Fig. 8 is perhaps the most fitting as it shows The Bombshell's attitude towards the enemy in November's 1918 issue.

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<sup>7</sup> 'To All At Home', The Bombshell, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 11.



Fig. 8.<sup>8</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

It is important to note, Delap claims, that there are problems to consider when examining humour, especially that which is almost 100 years old. These problems have certainly been evident whilst examining the content of *The Bombshell* and will be discussed in this chapter. Delap's work on exploring domestic service humour not only comments on the weaknesses of scrutinising humour from the past, but also examines the way in which humour is used to explore employer and employee relationships. This is a model that can and will be applied to exploring relations on the shop floor, to a certain extent.

This chapter will present and examine a selection of the articles featured in *The Bombshell* which were intended to provide comic relief for the workforce at Templeborough whilst also exploring aspects of welfare. The articles were written by staff who would contribute to the magazine each month. Some of the articles would provide the names of the author but in most cases many were published without the author's name or supplied just a pseudonym. Many articles were produced

<sup>8</sup> 'Scrapped', *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 7.

by more than one author and were possibly a collaboration of ideas that had originated from the shop floor, the canteen or the rest room, it is impossible to ascertain now.

The objects of satire found in *The Bombshell* would often include rationing, workers of both genders and parodies of relationships between shop floor and management, such as foremen. Examining humour in a selection of articles in *The Bombshell* will also contribute to the investigation of other topics such as welfare. Whilst welfare provision has been regarded by Whiteside as ‘a tactical alternative to industrial discipline’, welfare provision was represented in humorous articles.<sup>9</sup> Although most articles seemed to be humorous, they often possessed undertones and these were never more evident than in the section ‘Things We Want to Know.’ Graham Seal’s investigation of the trench press later in this chapter will present a deeper analysis of this article, which appeared in other similar publications around the same time period.

As Delap asserts, there are unfortunately problems when researching humour in historical documents. Often jokes may no longer be funny ‘to a modern reader’ as society may no longer perceive the subject or object of humour as funny, and especially when there has been significant cultural change, the humour may be regarded as racist or sexist.<sup>10</sup> As Delap notes, the ‘historical difference’ of humour is difficult to interpret because, ‘what was intended as satirical may now be read as neutral, as social realism, or as grotesque.’<sup>11</sup> The section ‘Things We Want to Know’ would often produce lines that may possibly be lost on the reader now if not given some context. One such example is ‘Who is the M.I.D. who likes Shem El Nessim?’<sup>12</sup> It cannot be ascertained if the question is referring to the religious holiday or the popular perfume of the time.

Humorous articles in *The Bombshell*, much like laughter in the domestic sphere, would act ‘as a vehicle for managing and negotiating emotional and social investments.’<sup>13</sup> These articles were often ‘important means of cementing or often abandoning the social scripts that governed interactions’.<sup>14</sup> This was especially important for the initial months in a newly built National Projectile Factory where, on the shop floor, there was much anxiety, irritation and misunderstanding. Humour in *The Bombshell* was not knowingly used to belittle or ridicule (unless the object of parody was the enemy). Instead, it promoted ‘social inclusion, informality and friendship.’<sup>15</sup>

At the Foreman’s Annual Dinner in January 1918, the editor of the magazine, Mr Wright, was asked to say a few words about *The Bombshell*. He stated that whilst the primary function of the

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<sup>9</sup> N. Whiteside, ‘Industrial Welfare and Labour Regulation in Britain at the Time of The First World War’, *International Review of History*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1980), p. 320.

<sup>10</sup> Delap, *op. cit.*, p. 628.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 627.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Things We Want to Know’, *The Bombshell*, April, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Delap, *op. cit.*, p. 627.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 628.



magazine had been one of unity and purpose, 'he had endeavoured as far as possible to build up the humorous side of the BOMBSHELL [sic], because in these times of stress and anxiety, to be able to laugh was one of the greatest of all anodynes.'<sup>16</sup> Mr Wright continued to add; 'The workers appreciated references to themselves and to their superintendents and foremen, and with them the 'Things we want to know' column' was the most popular page in the whole magazine.'<sup>17</sup>

The section 'Things We Want to know', appearing in the very first issue, was possibly included to combat some of the early frustrations that can be found in a new work force. This article, often asking rhetorical questions, proved popular and would continue until the very last publication in the 1930s, (the article was also adopted and adapted by other in-house journals after the war.) Questions would often be frivolous, such as 'Is it true that our Editor really had his haircut on the proceeds of the first number of "The Bombshell", or is it only a rumour?''<sup>18</sup> Some could possess a more serious tone; 'How many more want trousers?' asked the inquisitive section in the second issue, demonstrating that the need for uniforms was still evident.<sup>19</sup> Another similarly asked, 'Whether the new footgear is duly appreciated?''<sup>20</sup> Other questions are more significant. One asked 'Whether it does not seem that Ladies' Football Leagues have come to stay?''<sup>21</sup> It cannot be determined whether the question was meant sarcastically or whether the Football Leagues were welcomed, as the subject of women in sport had been warmly and widely reported in The Bombshell.

Sport and pastimes themselves were the object of parody in one article written especially for The Bombshell by the editor of The Lead-Swinger who had promised 'to contribute an occasional article' to the magazine.<sup>22</sup> While these were not the sports and pastimes of the Templeborough factory, Private Northend wanted to demonstrate that the boys at the Front had been afforded their own recreation. These had been provided as, 'the authorities, in the kindest of their hearts, have placed at our disposal a series of sports and pastimes which can be indulged in night or day, wet or fine.'<sup>23</sup> The sports included the "100 Yard Shell Sprint" and "The Trench Grid Wiggle-Woggle".<sup>24</sup>

Whereas 'rumour and gossip was the staple diet of almost every trench press' the same could be said for many in-house journals.<sup>25</sup> One personal account of a female worker admitted that the factory itself was 'a hot-bed of gossip.'<sup>26</sup> The column 'Things We Want to Know', or a variation

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<sup>16</sup> 'Factory News and Notes', The Bombshell, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> 'Things We Want to Know', The Bombshell, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, October, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, February, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 12, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> 'Sports and Pastimes', The Bombshell, August, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Seal, op. cit, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Marwick, op. cit, p. 63.

of the title, would serve as a rumour mill in trench journals where Seal claims 'it was used primarily to retail bits of hearsay.'<sup>27</sup> The first issue of *The Wipers Times* included the article 'Things We Want to Know' which mockingly tried to ascertain 'The name of the M.O. who attended one of the leading lights of the fancies and was overcome by her many charms.'<sup>28</sup> These type of 'Christmas cracker queries' were typical of the 'Things We Want to Know' section, which appeared in *The Wipers Times*, *The Whizz-Bang* and *The Trotter's Journal* among others.<sup>29</sup> The *Lead-Swinger*, with their own variation, 'Things we should like to know' asked 'If the statement of a well-known public speaker that "everything a man can do, woman [sic] can do equally well," is strictly true; and wherein lies the difference.'<sup>30</sup> More often than not, claims Seal, there were questions with a more sarcastic tone in the trench press. The 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion Third Canadian Division's *The Silent 60<sup>th</sup>* wanted to know, 'When are the Sixtieth going to get that "rest"? Are we to wait until we get a [sic] Blighty?'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, *The Whizz-Bang* asked, 'How to distinguish in wet weather between a Trench Communication, and a drain, common or garden?'<sup>32</sup> These questions displayed the weariness that was felt by the soldiers. Another from *The Whizz-Bang* simply wanted to know 'When am I going to get MY LEAVE?'<sup>33</sup>

Whilst tones of weariness were not often found in *The Bombshell's* 'Things We Want to Know', there were still a few examples; 'How many of the Office young ladies are expecting their boys home on leave, and what are they going to do about it?'<sup>34</sup> Signs of war-weariness would present themselves in other material and will be presented and examined in the next chapter. Queries were often fuelled in *The Bombshell* by shop-floor gossip. In one issue it was asked 'If there is any truth in the rumour that a certain well-known bachelor is about to take unto himself a wife?'<sup>35</sup> As Grant Michelson and Suchitra Mouly explain in their study of rumour and gossip in organisations, the range of issues that employees talk about and discuss 'do not always have as their form of origin formal channels of communication.'<sup>36</sup> Time spent gossiping was time lost on productivity as far as the management were concerned, yet gossip could help 'preserve group solidarity and formal structures at work.'<sup>37</sup> A column dedicated to gossip in *The Bombshell* would possibly mean that the management could 'actively manage and control the grapevine.'<sup>38</sup> Gossip was not now

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<sup>27</sup> Seal, op. cit, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> 'Things We Should Like to Know', *The Lead-Swinger*, (Sheffield Local Studies Library, (940 49SQ)),

<sup>31</sup> Seal, op. cit, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> 'Things We Want to Know', *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> G. Michelson & S. Mouly, 'Rumour and Gossip in Organisations: A Conceptual Study', *Management Decision*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (2000), p. 339.

<sup>37</sup> M. Noon & R. Delbridge, 'News From Behind My Hand: Gossip in Organisations', *Organization Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1993), p. 23-36.

<sup>38</sup> G. Michelson & S. Mouly, op. cit, p. 342.

merely ‘idle talk, but talk with a social purpose,’ to help reinforce ‘the social bond of the participants.’<sup>39</sup> The social purpose here was to inform and amuse at the same time.

A query in ‘Things We Want to Know’ may often have been intended as a quick jibe; one question asked, ‘If the foremen in the Staff Canteen have seen the point now?’<sup>40</sup> Again, the humour has been lost, either because of the time passed through the decades or simply because we do not know the nature behind the question. This example establishes that, similar to the trench press, authority could not escape being lampooned. One reader asked if it was possible to place in the following months ‘things we should all like to know. What is the name of the foreman who is frightened of to tell his men when they are doing wrong, instead of going to Mr So-and-so?’<sup>41</sup> The reader also asked if the same could be done to ask ‘Who is the lady charge-hand in A and B shop that was transferred and thought her girls loved her (I don’t think!)’<sup>42</sup> It is not possible to ascertain if this was a genuine dig at lower management or a light bit of humour.

Foremen could often find themselves satirised, possibly to build and cement relationships with staff. In one issue alone, there were five queries in a single column of ‘Things We Want to know’ which were directed at foremen, a few asked;

‘Who was the Foreman who had so many girls “absence of leave”?’

‘Who is the Foreman who thinks “Pamela Betty” the only suitable name for the best girl in the world?’

‘Who is the foreman who is so worried about the bassinette tax?’<sup>43</sup>

‘Things we can’t imagine’, appearing in only a few issues, was a more direct approach than ‘Things We Want to Know.’ It would often name staff, providing small comments meant in jest. Among the things they could not imagine were; “Gladys Cooper” in football costume... Mr. Harcourt being locked out... Mr. Hardy without a twinkle in his eye... Mr. Fox losing his temper... Mr. Connell keeping his.’<sup>44</sup> Some of these suggest that a few of the gentlemen are foremen and it is presumed these comments were made, and taken, in good nature.

As Delap states, this light ridicule of foreman or senior staff could help cement relationships within the workplace. It was also resonating the ‘long-standing British popular comic tradition of sending up those in authority.’<sup>45</sup> Fig. 9 demonstrates the comic relationship of the shop-floor worker and their respect for authority. One could complain, but not within the earshot of the employer.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Things We Want to Know’, The Bombshell, May, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 21.

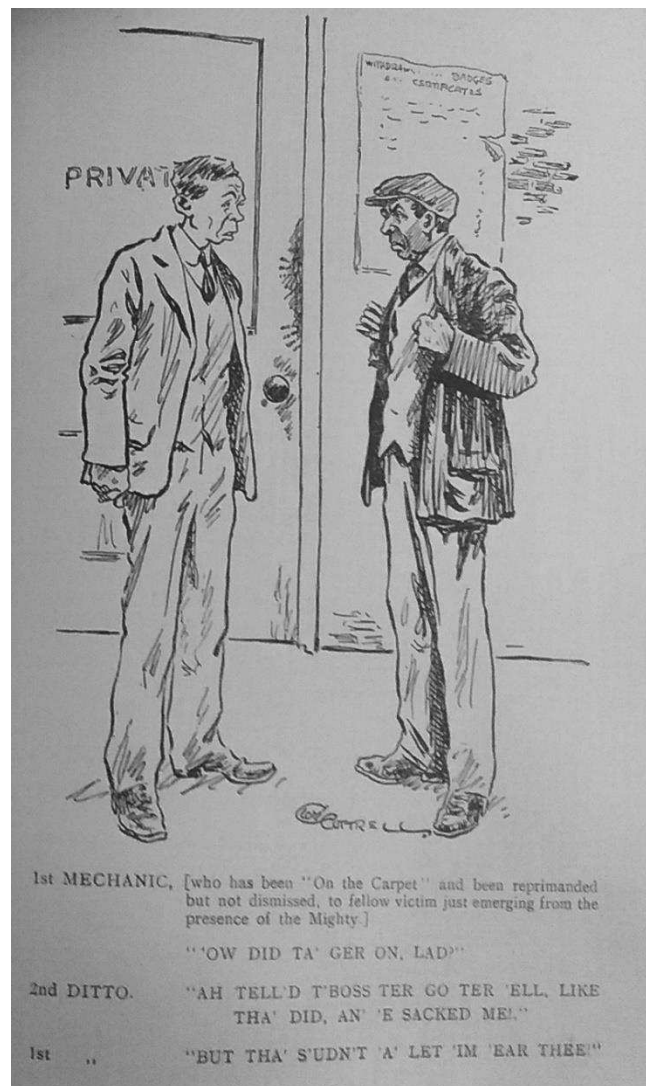
<sup>41</sup> ‘Stop Press’, The Bombshell, September, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Things We Want to Know’, The Bombshell, August, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 6, pp. 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Things We Can’t Imagine’, The Bombshell, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Delap, op. cit, p. 636.



1<sup>st</sup> Mechanic, "Ow did ta' ger on lad?"

2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanic, "Ah tell'd t'boss ter go ter 'ell, like tha' did. An' 'e sacked me!"

1<sup>st</sup> Mechanic "but tha' s'udn't a' let 'im 'ear thee!"

Fig. 9.<sup>46</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

In order to promote social inclusion, it would be more appropriate to direct humour at all staff, even the life of an editor was parodied, written by C.K.W, the editor himself.<sup>47</sup>

On the last page of the first edition of *The Bombshell*, the editor wrote;

'One of its [*The Bombshell*] foremost aims is to promote a feeling of unity among all the different classes of Staff and Employees... and to make everyone realise that Staff, Foremen, Operators, Gaugers, Toolsetters, Checkers are all working for one common purpose.'<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> 'The Life of an Editor', *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, pp. 26-28.

<sup>48</sup> *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 16.

This approach of attempting to unite ‘the different classes’ would help to ease social tensions and make ‘the status quo seem more sustainable.’<sup>49</sup> It would also enforce high productivity with everyone getting along. There was a war on after all. The humour in *The Bombshell* was an ‘invitation to belong’ which Andy Medhurst argues is constructed on ‘survival laughter’ precipitated by the daily grind and grimness of life in a National Projectile Factory.<sup>50</sup> The daily grind of life in the factory will be examined more closely in the next chapter as war weariness began to show in other forms of literature.

Notices and advertisements (or ‘Madvertisements’ as the latter were described) appeared in *The Bombshell* and, again similar to the trench press, they would often parody real life. Whilst these were not frequent in *The Bombshell* they are still worthy to note for what they did parody. Little is mentioned in *The Bombshell* on aiding the complexion suffered by munitions workers, and exists perhaps only in advertisements, but if the historian is examining the bound editions of *The Bombshell* it is important to note that advertisements have been often removed. (See Fig.10 and Fig.11.)



Fig.10. Advert for Oatine <sup>51</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

‘FREE ADVICE on how to cure every kind of skin trouble,’ announced one ‘Madvertisement’.<sup>52</sup> It proclaimed that demonstrations would be daily, ‘at all hours.’<sup>53</sup> Mr. Connell, possibly an

<sup>49</sup> Delap, op. cit, p. 629.

<sup>50</sup> A. Medhurst, *A National Joke* (London, 2007), pp. 19, 69.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. vi.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Notices and Madvertisements’, *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, (Imperial War Museum, Duxford: E. 94/1), p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

employee at the firm, confirmed that ‘Since attending the admirable demonstrations in No.14 office I have completely cured myself of acne, shingles and eczema. I am now trying to catch something else.’<sup>54</sup> There was obviously something or someone that attracted people like Mr. Connell to No.14 office, but the skit is highlighting the problems that the workers would suffer from. This is perhaps one of the few articles that would acknowledge that the women were working with hazardous materials. The dangers of working with TNT were as Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield note, ‘quietly swept under the carpet.’<sup>55</sup> The munitions workers were commonly called the ‘canaries’ because of the chemicals that they worked with caused them to have yellow skin. This was not the only condition they would suffer from. As Marion Kozak clarifies, ‘another type of poisoning’ in a different factory, was ‘caused by the manufacture of “black powder” which made their [the munitions workers] skins black.’<sup>56</sup> These munitions workers were known as ‘blackbirds’.<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 11. Advert for Ven-Yusa Face Cream.<sup>58</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> G. Braybon & P. Summerfield, op. cit, p. 95.

<sup>56</sup> Kozak, op. cit, p. 260.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The Bombshell, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 052. 74S), p. vii.

By 1917 there had been ‘a notable decline in TNT poisoning’ with the Ministry of Munitions investing ‘considerable resources in the development and maintenance of health and safety provision in filling factories.’<sup>59</sup> There was also an emphasis on ‘human comfort, engendered by an agreeable working environment.’<sup>60</sup> Welfare in the workplace and well-being among workers was, employers realised, in the best interests of increasing production. The Bombshell would occasionally compile often comical or rallying alphabetical verses of amenities of welfare, such as the Rest Room or the Canteen, to help boost morale. The verses may not have intended to come across as comical but they were intended to lift spirits hence their presence in this chapter. The ‘Rest Room Alphabet’ displayed how welcome the Rest Room was;

‘A for the artists who give us a treat,  
B for the books that we’d find hard to beat,  
C for the Chairs which need to be strong, (if they are not they don’t last very long),  
D for the Dancers who’ll dance all the day,  
E for the Energy we don’t all display,  
F the Fiasco’s which we never get, At least on Y. Gang which we think the best yet....’<sup>61</sup>

Alphabetical verses and lists were common in The Bombshell and included ‘The Alphabetical War Theme’ and ‘The “A, B, C,” of Victory’, among many others. The very first alphabetical list in The Bombshell appeared in the second issue, its theme, welfare, was one that would often find itself praised during the course of the war, but the one aspect of welfare that would find itself the victim of comical quip more often than not would be the canteen. The Canteen Alphabet began;

‘A is the Apple Machine – a new toy;  
B is the Buzzer that kills all the joy;  
C are the Cups, they are seldom used twice.  
D are the Drinks, very hot with some spice;  
E stands for Eggs, as fresh as you wish,  
F is the Fat that we use for Fried Fish....’<sup>62</sup>

There are no derisive comments here regarding the provisions of the canteen, only compliments. The canteen was welcomed in most trades where there had previously been little or no adequate

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<sup>59</sup> Spurgeon, op. cit, p. 58.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibi*, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> ‘A Rest Room Alphabet’, The Bombshell, October, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 8, (Imperial War Museum, Duxford: E. 94/1), p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Canteen Alphabet’, The Bombshell, April, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 16.

provision. Alphabetical verses displayed to the reader the canon of how life was in the factory. The ‘spirit’ of the N.P.F Mealtime was also parodied;

‘It was one busy morning in the N.P.F Canteen,  
Where most munition girls are often to be seen,  
Some shouting for tea, some shouting for jam,  
Everyone wants to be served as soon as they can!’<sup>63</sup>

This last article displays just how popular and busy the canteen was. The hectic routine of working in a canteen would also be included in a parody of “If”;

‘If you can hold your cup, when all about you  
Are dropping theirs, and spilling tea on you;  
If you can give right change when all men doubt you,  
And make allowance for their doubting, too;  
If you can serve, and not get tired of serving,  
And, being asked for buns, don’t deal out pies;  
If you can weather shocks, howe’er unnerving,  
And bear with disappointments and goodbyes.

...

If you can serve all sorts, and not get hardened,  
And talk with saints and not become a prig;  
If real or fancied wrongs are quickly pardoned,  
If small men count with you as well as big;  
If you can meet each unromantic minute,  
With willing labour and a smiling face,  
Yours is the Hut, and everyone who’s in it,  
And - which is more - you will have saved the Race.’<sup>64</sup>

The verse was demonstrating, perhaps as a good-natured initiation, what the life as a canteen worker entailed and how a new worker could potentially survive the shift unscathed. Towards the end the verse emphasises how important the canteen was to the running of the factory. It is, perhaps, an excellent paradigm which demonstrates the importance of the provision of welfare amenities. Noelle Whiteside argues that it was possible to see, during the First World War, an

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<sup>63</sup> ‘The N. P. F. Mealtime’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> ‘If’, *The Bombshell*, August, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 13.



‘increased state involvement in a number of initiatives designed to effect social improvement.’<sup>65</sup> The Savile Street Canteen had been planned since 1916 with temporary canteens ‘provided at the Tinsley Works with excellent results.’<sup>66</sup> The new canteen would be opened on the 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 and was intended ‘to be a permanent endeavour to keep abreast of the times and generally improve working conditions.’<sup>67</sup> The canteen would also save employees from ‘having to make a journey to and from the city’ to find a reasonably priced meal in a comfortable environment, no doubt improving efficiency.<sup>68</sup>



Fig. 12. One of the Dining Rooms, Savile Street Canteen.<sup>69</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

Both the Rest Room and the canteen, Whiteside claims, were among ‘justified systems designed to restore the “personal touch” to a shop-floor increasingly remote from management.’<sup>70</sup> Concessions of welfare could be made, ‘without damaging the ultimate authority of the employer.’<sup>71</sup> The health and welfare of munitions workers was important enough to be ‘a cause for official concern.’<sup>72</sup> If the munition worker was not ‘a competent productive unit’ then this would raise concerns regarding productivity for the war effort.<sup>73</sup> As Whiteside states, this concern for the welfare of the worker had one real purpose; ‘the promotion of maximum industrial

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<sup>65</sup> Whiteside, op. cit, p. 307.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Savile Street Canteen, The Bombshell, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 96.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Saville Street Canteen’, The Bombshell, July, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 7, p. 260.

<sup>70</sup> Whiteside, op. cit, p. 309.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

output.<sup>74</sup> This concern had previously been raised by the Health of Munition Workers' Committee in September 1915 where it was stated 'without health there is no energy, without energy there is no output.'<sup>75</sup> It was declared in *System*, a magazine of management, that 'Employers want regular attendance, and on the part of women, a maintained output.'<sup>76</sup> The article declared, 'It is found that if they are kept in good health and high spirits these can be obtained.'<sup>77</sup>

With the health of the worker in mind, the Health of Munition Workers' Committee made recommendations of welfare for workers including breaks, pauses, holidays, cloakrooms, rest rooms, overalls and the provision of canteens.<sup>78</sup> Investigations were also undertaken by the Health of Munitions Workers Committee into 'food requirements, food values... and the best methods of constructing canteens and running them.'<sup>79</sup> The last line of the poem declared to the canteen worker that 'you will have saved the Race' and reiterated to the reader that the canteen served a very important purpose, as did the canteen worker. Several canteen workers would be awarded a silver medal each for their attendance and punctuality, having not missed a day's work for a full year.<sup>80</sup> The manageress of the Templeborough Canteen, Miss Morgan, perhaps summarised its importance by reflecting in November, 1918 that;

'The great benefits which have been derived from canteens are amongst the most important lessons the war has taught us... Much has been done in the way of giving cheap, nourishing and well-cooked food to the workers... There is no doubt that canteens are among the good things that have come from the war.'<sup>81</sup>

The Tram Car System was another form of welfare which was often the object of ridicule in *The Bombshell*. In 'Heart Throbs', a mock 'Dear Auntie' page demonstrated one of the fabricated complaints. 'A.M.6 wishes to know if the Tanks were designed upon the same principle as the R\_\_\_\_\_ Trams?' wrote the fictitious Aunt Sylvia.<sup>82</sup> 'I think not', she answered the query, 'the Motion of the Tanks for one thing being impressive whilst that of the R\_\_\_\_\_ Cars is depressive. Also I would point out that the Tanks have toothed wheels, I believe the aforesaid cars have square wheels.'<sup>83</sup> The tram journeys in Rotherham were often parodied for not being a smooth form of transport, as Fig.13 illustrates.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>76</sup> Kozak, op. cit, p. 256.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Whiteside, op. cit, p. 314.

<sup>79</sup> Kozak, op. cit, p. 242.

<sup>80</sup> 'News and Notes', *The Bombshell*, October, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> 'Heart Throbs', *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

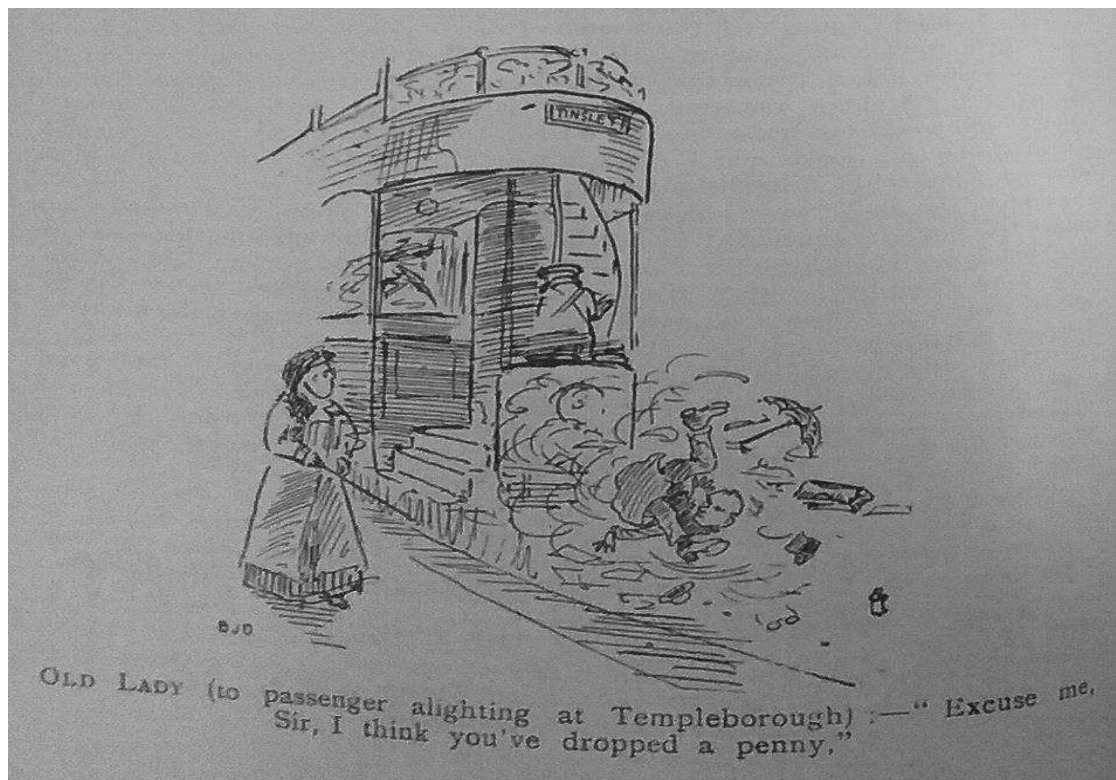


Fig. 13.<sup>84</sup> Reproduced with permission from The Imperial War Museum.

It was not just the trams themselves that were parodied, conversations 'overheard' on the trams also provided much amusement and possibly contributed to speculation and gossip that would find itself in other sections such as 'Things We Want to Know.' Attitudes towards the tram cars were also reflected in parodied verses;

'Three Rotherham trams,  
 Three Rotherham trams,  
 See how they've stuck,  
 See how they've stuck,  
 They're on their way to the Factory;  
 If they get there a surprise it will be,  
 They never attempt to arrive, as you see,  
 Three Rotherham Trams.'<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> The Bombshell, September, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> 'Welfare', The Bombshell, July, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 39.

Humour did not just reflect services, it could also display sardonic commands for the workers. One issue of *The Bombshell* displayed 'The Ten Commandments of the Munition Workshop', written by H. Hill, among them were;

1. Thou shalt not quibble with thy Foreman.
3. Thou shalt not use "corrosive" language at all.
5. Honour the Heads of the Firm, and keep thy lathe in good trim, so thy trials may be less, and thine output good on the job which thy Foreman giveth thee.<sup>86</sup>

The same type of biblical script was often prevalent in other literature and verse as will be explored in the next chapter. Although intended to be light-hearted, this article contained features regarding conduct. As Kozak notes, 'conduct was as important as a separate qualification for work... [and] conduct was an important consideration on the factory floor.'<sup>87</sup> These 'qualifications' were acknowledged when employing women applicants into munitions factories yet, as Kozak remarks, they were 'criteria never used in the case of men.'<sup>88</sup>

Humour not only kept the mood of the magazine light-hearted but 'promoted and connoted' conformity and authority, yet unlike humour found in Delap's study of domestic humour or in Seal's investigation of the trench press, it was not one of mockery but of social inclusion and possible friendship.<sup>89</sup> (Unlike the trench press, which was an authentic voice from the soldiers, *The Bombshell* had been produced by the management of the firm with contributions that could be controlled.) Yet, as will be presented in the next chapter, it would not be only humour that would achieve this. Examining humour has offered a deeper investigation that has enabled the reader to conclude 'with a richer set of insights' than has normally been presented.<sup>90</sup>

The final issue of *The Bombshell* at the Templeborough factory commented; 'It is hoped that the thousands of women who have been busy on shell production will, in their peace labours, find pretext for continuing the 'Bombshell' in some form.'<sup>91</sup> As the First World War came to a close, so too, did the need for many of the 'shops' and, ultimately, the factory. Women were expected to leave the roles they had adopted over the course of the war and return to their homes. Yet their legacy at Templeborough would live on in poems and literature which reflected the roles they performed, not only as colleagues but also as women war-workers. The next chapter will explore how both literature and verse in *The Bombshell* would represent the lives, loves and imaginations of the workers at Templeborough through the course of the war.

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<sup>86</sup> 'The Ten Commandments of the Munition Workshop', *The Bombshell*, April, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 16.

<sup>87</sup> Kozak, op. cit, p. 267-8.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>89</sup> Delap, op. cit, p. 651.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 43.

## Chapter Four

### The Workings of The Bombshell – Contributions of Literature and Poetry

Literature and poetry from the First World War has previously focussed on the aspect of war itself and the experiences of the soldiers in the trenches and on the battlefield. Yet, in the past twenty years, there has been an increase in studies on women's poetry and literature during the war. As Trudi Tate and Suzanne Raitt acknowledge in their introduction on women's fiction in the First World War, both 'technological and imaginative boundaries were shifting.'<sup>1</sup> Women workers were having to adapt to working with machinery they had rarely, if ever, used before in the factories. Opportunities also arose in print for many workers, of both sexes, to describe through literature or art their experiences of the war. As has previously been stated, trench journals were becoming increasingly commonplace throughout the war and had illustrated how imaginative boundaries had changed. Whilst workers contributing to work magazines may not have been a new phenomenon, the situation of war and growing literate population was unique. Magazines, such as *The Landswoman Magazine* and *The Forger* presented opportunities for workers to submit their own short stories and verses and *The Bombshell* was no different. Literature and poetry both became an important feature of *The Bombshell*. The workers found they were presented with an opportunity to express themselves and produced material that not only explored the war but that of relationships, grievances and other aspects which were characteristic to the setting of the factory and of the period itself. For many, having their work published would be the first, and perhaps only, opportunity they would have to see their efforts in print.

*The Bombshell* encouraged workers of both sexes to submit their own poems and stories that would ultimately assist the magazine in becoming as popular as it did, not only among Firth's own workforce but also reaching those fighting overseas. As the first issue proclaimed, 'any effort... we can create a common interest must be productive of good.'<sup>2</sup> It was these common interests that would prove to be popular, and would help to enrich the poetry and stories that were submitted; the different styles and variation helping to keep the content fresh yet still familiar to its readers. It was also an opportunity to share similar experiences, further assisting in creating a sense of community.

It is the intention of this chapter to examine the content of a selection of literature and poetry that appeared in *The Bombshell* during the war. It will explore the way in which individuals would portray their work in a romanticised fashion, whilst others would display some of the gritty truths behind war work in a munitions factory. It is not the intention of this chapter to investigate who the contributors of the material were, as this may prove impossible. Some authors would remain

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<sup>1</sup> T. Tate & S. Raitt, eds. *Women's Fiction and the Great War* (Oxford, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> 'Foreword', *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

anonymous though others would include their name or a pseudonym, and these will be provided wherever possible.

Occasionally work was published, not in the same month as it was submitted, but when the editor felt it was most appropriate to be included in the magazine. This would also often include literature, poems and illustrations that were reprinted from other magazines, such as *The Forger* or *Punch*. The *Bombshell* emphasised solidarity, and would predominantly portray a positive image of a happy, productive and determined workforce. Yet there would be occasions, as the second part of this chapter will explore, where war-weariness was beginning to show, and was reflected in some of the literature, poetry and editorials. The fact that this material was published, despite some of the negativity that was prominent in it, reflected the solidarity that the workers felt they could share with their fellow workers.

The first example of literature presented in *The Bombshell* was *The Autobiography of a Shell*. It appeared, quite fittingly, in the very first issue of *The Bombshell* and, in a first-person narrative, explored the process that the shell went through to be 'born'. Similar to *Fuze 106: The Adventures of a Detonator Plug*, printed in *The War-Worker*, the Shell described its own adventures.<sup>3</sup> It recounted waiting in a queue in the furnace, 'in a big Factory somewhere in England', where a pair of tongs 'hoisted me off my feet and plunged me down into a round pocket with very little room to move.'<sup>4</sup> The Shell also relayed its journey of travelling to another factory, now as a Shell Forging, and described its shock of seeing girls there; 'Hundreds of them! Thousands of them! All sorts and all sizes – and all of them beauteous.'<sup>5</sup> The Shell Forging announced it would further recount its tales in following issues of *The Bombshell*. This would hopefully entice readers to buy further issues of the magazine, to read the continuation of the Shell Forging's journey and exploits. The story gave its author's identity simply as A.B.E. Although the story concluded in issue two of *The Bombshell*, there would appear a further conclusion in issue four as A.B.E. commented to the editor; 'A draughtsman wanted to put in a few fragments of the Boches.'<sup>6</sup>

The first issue also contained *The Stupidometer* which described the quality of the work and the high productivity that the female workers were displaying in the factory. The most notable aspect of this piece of literature, written by T.V.S., was that it was written in a sense of biblical retelling. The story opened with, 'And it came to pass in the days of Armageddon the Great', whilst also referring to the women workers as 'damsels'.<sup>7</sup> The story explained that there were some individuals in industry that did not want to work alongside the women, and described these uncooperative workers as being not as intelligent as those who were willing to work alongside

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<sup>3</sup> "'Fuze 106: The Adventures of a Detonator Plug,'" by a Detonator Plug Girl, in *Perivale*, 'The War-Worker, September, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Autobiography of a Shell', *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> 'The Autobiography of a Shell, (Concluded)', *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Stupidometer', *The Bombshell*, March, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 13.

their female colleagues. Attitudes towards female workers have already been explored in earlier chapters yet this is the first time it had been written about in this style.

Another example of using a biblical style of writing was also presented in *The Copper Press*.<sup>8</sup> Written again by T.V.S., *The Copper Press* describes the workings of a machine, presumably used at the factory. It began ‘And it came to pass that word from the Lord of the Hieroglyphics came unto the scribe, saying, “Write ye upon a matter pertaining unto the works.” Wherefore he wrote concerning the engine.’<sup>9</sup> The piece describes the workings of the appliance and would probably only appeal to those who would be familiar with machine. The text was possibly demonstrating the complexity of different machines within the factory, displaying that each department possessed their own technical and professional knowledge that was required in order to perform their tasks. The story would almost certainly not appeal to those working in different departments, such as the canteen, and unless the reader had any past technical knowledge, it would certainly not greatly appeal to the reader today.

*The Munitioneers*, uncredited, commented on the workers receiving so much pay that they did not possibly know how to spend it. Woollacott agrees that the women workers alone were now ‘earning more money than ever before.’<sup>10</sup> The literature, again in biblical script, began with;

‘And many were put to labour on munitions, and they did work them long hours at a goodly recompense. And when the week was come unto its end, then did they receive their hire; and because it was a lot of money, they knew not what to do with it.’<sup>11</sup>

The short piece continued to comment that the Munitioneers would buy musical instruments and dress themselves in extravagant clothes so much that when ‘they ventured into public places, there was a stir among the populace.’<sup>12</sup> The piece concluded by remarking that those who were ‘full of wisdom and aflame for En [England]’ knew that it was earned from working in munitions.<sup>13</sup> The Munitioneers reminded the workers that they were being paid handsomely for their work and that it was also work that they should be proud to be part of.

Whilst it was not written in a biblical style, *Pepys Visits the N.P.F.*, by C. K.W., the editor, was written in the style of old English. As was with *The Autobiography of a Shell*, this was written in a first-person narrative yet with an outsider’s take on the Templeborough Factory. The narrator in question for this chronicle was Samuel Pepys, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Member of Parliament, famous for his diaries on the Great Fire of London amongst other things. Pepys explained that he had

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<sup>8</sup> ‘The Copper Press’, *The Bombshell*, June, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> ‘The Munitioneers’, *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

been invited to the factory by ‘mine olde [sic] friend E. Kaye.’<sup>14</sup> Mr. E. Kay was the works manager of Templeborough and had supplied the foreword of that month’s particular issue. Pepys remarked on the sight of witnessing ‘thousands of wenches at the long rowes [sic] of lathes.’<sup>15</sup> He further remarked on the attire of the women workers; ‘What did chiefly interest me was to see that most of the wenches were wearing of breeches, being the colour of Khaki, which did please me mightily.’<sup>16</sup>

Pepys recounts being shown around the factory, including visiting ‘Mistress Gorringer’ who ‘received us very civilly, taking us round and showing us all her cooking gear.’<sup>17</sup> Even though the narrative is fictitious, it provides the unfamiliar reader with an insight to some of the characters of the factory. For example, Pepys describes ‘Mistress Gorringer’ of ‘being very ready of tongue and quick of repartee’ helping to display the character of the woman that would manage the canteen and its staff.<sup>18</sup> The narrative helps to portray, as the real Pepys had intended in his own diaries, a first-hand account of visiting the factory. He further writes about the canteen, describing the moment when ‘the doors opened and in rushed 2,000 hungry wenches, all clamouring at the counters.’<sup>19</sup> Whilst some of the story may possibly be embellished for dramatic effect, it helps to enable the reader to have a mental image of the factory, regardless of when or where they are reading *The Bombshell*. Pepys would return in the 1917 November issue, this time accompanied by his wife in *Pepys on Pay-day*.<sup>20</sup> Pepys would not be the only visitor to the Templeborough Factory, in 1918’s January edition Hooratio [sic] Bottomley also made an appearance, again written by C. K. W., and proceeded to compliment the workers on his visit to the factory.

Romantic literature also appeared in *The Bombshell*, albeit mostly in a humorous format. Romance had appeared in magazines for young working women in weekly papers including *Our Girls*, *Girl’s Friend* and *Girls Weekly*, and would later feature munitions workers as the heroines of romantic stories.<sup>21</sup> The N.P.F. Novel began by being described as: ‘Published in response to a request to “ave summat wi’ courtin’ in it”’ and was presented as a parody of such romantic fiction as mentioned above.<sup>22</sup> The ‘novel’ began by introducing its characters, of which there were only three, and then proceeded to start at chapter 57. The story describes a woman munitions worker, Sylvia, being romantically sought after by a Foreman, only to be rebuffed as she announces ‘I did once love a man, but he ...’ without finishing. The story describes her fainting and then, upon waking, panicking about not being able to find her milling cutters before fainting again. On awakening a second time she realises that her long lost love, Jack, is now in front of her and

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Pepys Visits the N. P. F. ’, *The Bombshell*, April, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Pepys on Pay-day’, *The Bombshell*, November, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 9, p. 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>22</sup> ‘N. P. F. Novel’, *The Bombshell*, May, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 14.



promptly faints twice more before the end of the story. The Editor announced humorously, that the story was: 'To be discontinued.'<sup>23</sup>

Love at Templeborough was another romantic piece of literature. It is difficult to ascertain at the beginning if it was intended to be humorous or not. The story was introduced as a new instalment, 'secured, at enormous cost... by those world-famous writers Agnus and Maud Askus.'<sup>24</sup> The story, set at Templeborough, began by introducing the two main protagonists, Mr Smythe-Smythe, a Foreman, and a young woman, Hermione Browne, a munitions worker. The story would continue over several instalments, displaying the progress of the blossoming relationship. The conclusion of the story would appear in issue seven of *The Bombshell* with Hermione and Smythe-Smythe on a date in the park. They compare their interests, of which they have a similar taste, until Smythe-Smythe informs Hermione that he uses Euthymol toothpaste at which point she interrupts him 'with a hysterical scream' before becoming silent.<sup>25</sup> Hermione finally reveals, in the last sentence of the story, that she uses Colgate's toothpaste. It can only be surmised from this ending that the serial was, indeed, intended to be humorous and the abrupt ending was the comedic punch-line. As Woollacott notes, romantic fiction did 'not provide any insight into women workers' thoughts ... because it was written for them, not by them.'<sup>26</sup> The above examples may possibly have not been written by women, but were included to mock the stories which were presented in other magazines that were aimed at middle-class women. After all, the majority of women workers Templeborough were working-class.

While we have a *Smoke* described a small group of men who would recount nonsensical tales regarding travel, nature or technical and mechanical subjects to each other whilst on their work break. The piece was popular and not only become a frequent contribution in *The Bombshell* but would also spawn a female version, titled *Over a Cup of Tea*.<sup>27</sup> The men were known only by a single initial, M, T, P, and S, whilst *Over a Cup of Tea* would provide the full, fictitious, names of the characters who included Miriam, Rachel and Jane. Both articles were written by The Scribe, Scribo or Scibissumus, possibly the same author yet under different variations of the pseudonym. In both cases the story would end with the siren or hooter announcing the end of the break and, ultimately, the discussion.

Literature was not just for the entertainment of the adults. Children's literature also appeared, albeit not very often. The 1917 Christmas edition of *The Bombshell* included *The Magic Bombshell*, 'A Fairy Tale for children,' written by Jean Dowding, who was 11 years old when writing the story. The editor commented that 'it would be a good idea if we could have a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> 'Love at Templeborough', *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> 'Love at Templeborough, Continued', *The Bombshell*, September, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 14-15.

<sup>26</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 206.

<sup>27</sup> 'Over A Cup of Tea', *The Bombshell*, April, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 40-41.

“Children’s Corner” in *The Bombshell* every month.’<sup>28</sup> Though this never fully materialised, (Jean would also contribute the story *A Peerless Beauty* the following year), it displays the level of paternalism *The Bombshell* wished to achieve, just as the *Port Sunlight News* had shown with its own readers, to include the whole family.

The 1917 Christmas edition of *The Bombshell* also included the Templeborough Munition Song, ‘dedicated to Mrs W. H. Gorrings of Kingston-by-Sea, and to all Munition Workers.’<sup>29</sup> Written by S. C. Michell, the song was dedicated to all who ‘slog away at the bright steel shells’ whilst also demonstrating that they were playing their part by feeding the guns to ‘hasten the Hun to Perdition.’<sup>30</sup> The song contained a rallying chorus which chanted;

‘Munitions! Munitions!  
It’s we who make munitions!  
We’ll carry on, we’ll carry on!  
In spite of War’s conditions!’<sup>31</sup>

The song was patriotic in nature and was possibly included in the Christmas edition for its jingoistic tone. In the same Christmas edition of *The Bombshell*, a similar poem, *The Song of the Women* by C. M. F., was reprinted from *The Englishwoman*, another popular publication. The poem relayed the work of women in a factory;

‘Here in the din of whirling machinery,  
Grinding, deafening perpetual noise,  
Here in the din of whirling machinery,  
Making presents to send our boys.’<sup>32</sup>

The Templeborough Munition Song would not be the only song to be printed along with sheet music in *The Bombshell*. *The Girl and the Lathe*, was reprinted, in the 1918 January edition, with kind permission from the editor of *The Shell Magazine*, the Leeds National Ordnance Factory’s own magazine. The song, written by R. G. Parkinson, was another depiction of a worker with their machine. The song was more direct with its tone of hostility towards the enemy than was usually presented;

‘O’ my heart is fierce with anger,  
And it rouses me from languor,  
When I hear of what the wicked Germans do,

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<sup>28</sup> ‘The Magic Bombshell’, *The Bombshell*, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> ‘The Templeborough Munition Song’, *The Bombshell*, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 20-22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> ‘The Song of the Women’, *The Bombshell*, December, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 37.

And I speed the turning shell,  
As a German's deathly knell,  
For the lathe is singing now in anger too.<sup>'33</sup>

Deborah Thom notes that each workshop would have its own song and this helped to illustrate not only the jingoistic pride that the women were taking in their work but also how it enabled them to proudly display 'a strong sense of identity of purpose with soldiers, wounded and serving.'<sup>34</sup> The songs would also help the women 'to distinguish themselves from the women workers in the next shed, factory, or process.'<sup>35</sup> This notion of identity is comparable to how the soldiers would distinguish their own units with the trench press, by setting themselves apart from other regiments. The lathes would also be mentioned in another poem, in a later issue of *The Bombshell*, by a more famous author. *The Song of the Lathes* was written by Rudyard Kipling, and was not his first poem to feature in the magazine (*The Holy War* had been reprinted in the previous issue.)<sup>36</sup>

*Sheffield in a Trench* was 'reprinted by the kind permission of "The Spectator"', a popular weekly magazine.<sup>37</sup> The poem presents the view of a young soldier who is most possibly serving overseas and misses his home town. The poet mentions the rivers of Sheffield, the rolling mills and grinding wheels and 'the blunt old Sheffield speech.'<sup>38</sup> In the last verse the author reminds the reader of the war and why he is there;

'But here we are! – "What for?" You say?  
To teach the Boche the time of day,  
And keep him far enough away,  
From setting foot in Sheffield.'<sup>39</sup>

The author signed himself as 'A Sheffield Lad.'<sup>40</sup> The poem was possibly included to remind workers why their fellow towns-folk were fighting at the Front. This would not be the only poem or literature that would be included for this purpose.

Letters, as has been previously discussed, were sent in from soldiers serving overseas. One such letter described some of the atrocities in France. The letter, *An Appeal from France*, recounted a soldier's experience, whilst passing through a certain village, of reading papers from home describing that 'some of our Labour comrades are arguing with the Government.'<sup>41</sup> Whilst he

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<sup>33</sup> 'The Girl and her Lathe', *The Bombshell*, January, 1918, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> D. Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls* (London, 1998), p. 154.

<sup>35</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 192.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Holy War', *The Bombshell*, March, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> 'Sheffield in a Trench', *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> 'An Appeal from France', *The Bombshell*, April, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 14.

thanked the readers for their support and acknowledged the sacrifices those at home had made, he asked the readers; ‘Cannot you stand by us to the end? Have your very sons, brothers; and pals died in vain?’<sup>42</sup> The author confirmed that he understood the sacrifices those at home were making but went on to say that at least they had houses to live in whilst sleeping ‘on beds with sheets and real pillows.’<sup>43</sup> He then informed the reader of the horrors that those at home had not seen, such as witnessing men, women and children fleeing their homes, or ‘a girl lying at the side of the road... with a bullet through her head.’<sup>44</sup> The author, once again, thanked the readers for their past help and asked them to stand together until the end of the war. It is impossible to determine if this letter was truly written by a soldier from the Front or whether it was simply war propaganda. In either case, it reflected some of the gritty realism which began to appear in *The Bombshell* whilst also emphasising the notion of remaining united in challenging times.

Some of the weariness of war was reflected in the smallest of verses. *When is the War going to end?* was no more than six lines long yet displayed sentiments, in a comical fashion, that were most likely felt by others;

‘Absolute knowledge I have none,  
But my Aunt’s Charwoman’s sister’s son,  
Heard a policeman on his beat,  
Say to a Housemaid in Downing Street,  
That he had a brother who had a friend,  
Who knew when the war was going to end.’<sup>45</sup>

The author acknowledged himself as P’raps, and was a sketch that was worthy of *The Leadswinger*. Parodies would also reflect some of the weariness that was beginning to appear. *An Optimist in a Restaurant*, ‘A Skit on our present day struggles’, displayed some of the frustrations felt by some.<sup>46</sup> The poem described a man, sitting in a restaurant, imagining luxury foods instead of what he had been served;

‘He thought He saw a roast of Lamb surrounded by green peas,  
He looked again and found it was some imitation cheese...  
He thought he saw some marmalade upon a jamless day,  
He looked again – ‘twas margarine that on the platter lay,  
“That’s clever conjuring”, he said, “I wish I knew the way.”’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> ‘When is the War going to end?’, *The Bombshell*, July, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> ‘An Optimist in a Restaurant’, *The Bombshell*, September, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 7, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Rationing had frequently been mentioned in *The Bombshell* as one of the many grievances workers would encounter. The very next page which followed *An Optimist in a Restaurant* displayed *An Ode to Jam 'By One who has Suffered.'*<sup>48</sup>

Poetry would also reflect the criticisms of work at the Templeborough factory. *Who said it was up to Inspection?*, written by F.I.D., describes the process of shells being made and remarks on the quality of them.<sup>49</sup> The poem remarks that 'the good shells are less' and that the workers can still 'rectify them at the Final.'<sup>50</sup> The shells which are beyond repair are taken away and the fault is blamed partly on the Gaugers for being 'too strict.'<sup>51</sup> It describes that the machinists feel that they are being 'done out of their pay' and that it was not their fault that the shells were not of good quality.<sup>52</sup> The poem finishes by remarking that 'if only the good Shells were sent up the Shop' then none would have to be returned and the final report 'would increase the output and Bonus you know.'<sup>53</sup> The poem is quite serious in tone and gives the reader an insight to some of the grievances that the workers had to face if the quality of work was not up to scratch. Even though the poem is critical of shells being rejected and losing out on the bonus, it serves as a reminder to the workers to ensure that production of shells is of the upmost quality, quite possibly the reason why it was included in *The Bombshell* as most grievances were often submitted, tongue-in-cheek to the section 'Things We Want to Know.'

*The Girls of D Shop* romanticised the notion of working at Firth's. The author describes the experience of returning to work at the Templeborough factory, having previously left. 'We did not enjoy the parting' wrote Nellie Eyre;

'But, after having waited,  
We are being reinstated,  
On other operations in the works...  
We are scattered up and down the shops,  
But what operations it matters not.'<sup>54</sup>

The camaraderie among the workers was often reflected in the magazine though not all literature romanticised daily life in the factory. *Tool-setting in a Northern Factory* was a story, written by an ex-employee of D-Shop, Marjorie Walford, and was reprinted from *The Queen*. The story is narrated by a female protagonist who is a tool-setter and presents a unique insight into an ordinary day for the workers. The narrator is a female tool-setter and describes moments that ranged from

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> 'Who said it was up to Inspection?' *The Bombshell*, July, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Girls of D Shop', *The Bombshell*, November, 1917, Vol. 1, No. 9, p. 21.

‘an unwritten law of tool-setting where you do not approach the lathes of other tool-setters unless they are absent’ to hearing of ‘plaints of being “broke down”’.<sup>55</sup> The story depicts life in the factory as being gritty and hard work, describing moments of fixing a machine as a ‘dreaded process’ resulting in ‘a long gash in your hand, and a piece of skin sitting upon the end of the spanner.’<sup>56</sup> She also recounts how one of the women is injured, albeit not seriously, by having her apron caught in one of the lathes. The protagonist described eagerly awaiting the sound of the hooter that would announce breakfast in the ‘big new canteen’, though she took ‘the necessary precaution of hiding my tools and spanners in a secret place.’<sup>57</sup>

On returning to work alongside a fellow machinist, the writer remarks on noticing ‘the shabby black skirt’ she is wearing, only to discover that she is wearing it as a mark of respect as her brother had died the day before, presumably in battle.<sup>58</sup> As the working day draws to an end the writer comments on having the unenviable job of making sure none of the girls ‘knock off too early.’<sup>59</sup> The story concludes with the end of the shift, informing the reader that the women are all exhausted and will soon be in bed before returning to a similar, monotonous shift the next day. The story is unusual as it does not portray the work in a romantic or jingoistic manner; it simply describes the grittiness of long working hours, machines breaking down, taking orders, hostile working relationships and sudden bereavement. It may have been this true portrayal of life in a northern factory was possibly the writer’s way of narrating the work that the women were doing without romanticising it. The Editor remarks on the story as being a ‘most interesting sketch’ before informing the readers that Marjorie had gone on to exchange ‘her munition overall for the uniform of a V. A. D. Nurse.’<sup>60</sup> Marjorie’s account of her role in the Great War was certainly not unique, as Olive Dent had recorded her own story in A VAD in France which had been published in 1917.<sup>61</sup>

Marjorie’s and Olive’s accounts certainly differed from a more jingoistic interpretation of working in a munitions factory, which was published as part of an essay-writing competition by the YMCA Magazine Our Outlook in 1916.<sup>62</sup> The essayist wrote;

‘Monotony is out of the question... A more good-natured, whole-hearted, livelier set of girls and women you could not meet anywhere. Each one is bent on doing her bit for King and country. I am sure every worker has the same principle as

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Tool-Setting in a Northern Factory’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> J. Potter, ‘“A great purifier”: The Great War in Women’s Romances and Memoirs 1914 – 1918,’ in T. Tate, & S. Raitt, eds. *Women’s Fiction and the Great War* (Oxford, 1997), p. 102

<sup>62</sup> Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

myself, each one knowing she is needed to push on the mighty work of bringing this dreadful war to an end.’<sup>63</sup>

As Woollacott clarifies, it was essays such as the one in *Our Outlook*, that possibly won the essay-writing competition because its author was either ‘truly fired by patriotic ideals or at least thought the prize would go to someone who claimed to be.’<sup>64</sup> *Tool-Setting in a Northern Factory* also broached the subject of accidents at work, commenting on the woman catching the arm of her sleeve in the water-wheel at the back of a lathe and, ‘although it was nothing serious... her arm itself [was] bruised and twisted.’<sup>65</sup> It is important, as Woollacott reminds us, to acknowledge that women experienced accidents and even death in the factory.<sup>66</sup> Even the death of loved ones, such as sons, husbands, fathers, or, in the case of the girl wearing the black skirt, brothers, was something that could be shared ‘in the spirit of grief-stricken participation in munitions.’<sup>67</sup> The subject of death was not an unfamiliar concept, in *The Bombshell*, however it was usually only mentioned when crushing the enemy.

Whilst letters from soldiers serving overseas had been previously published in the magazine, *The Bombshell* introduced a new feature regarding the welfare of soldiers in August 1918. With the heading, *Concerning Missing Friends*, the editor announced that this new feature would ‘use the pages of the “Bombshell” as a means of trying to find the whereabouts of any missing soldier, relative or friend of any of our N. P. F. workers.’<sup>68</sup> It would become apparent that it would be mainly soldiers that the instalment would be enquiring on. There was just one missing person listed in this issue; ‘Pte. C. V. E. Belfield, A Coy., 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 3<sup>rd</sup> Batt, 3<sup>rd</sup> Worcestershire Regt., B. E. F.’<sup>69</sup> This section would become lengthier as people realised they now had the chance to enquire about their missing loved ones in a popular magazine.

One of the last poems that would feature in the war years of *The Bombshell* was *A Page from a Shell's Diary*, written by Minnie Seddon.<sup>70</sup> It was similar in tone to *The Autobiography of a Shell*, and is quite fitting as the latter had been the first piece of literature that appeared in the magazine. Though the poem still described the shell being made, it did not mention the war was now over, most probably because this was not written purposely for the November edition but had been chosen to mark the end of the munitions production. It is, however, another poem of Minnie's, *Munition Girls*, appearing in the same issue, and possibly chosen for the same reason, which would become more recognised in literature that future authors would mention regarding munition workers.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Tool-Setting in a Northern Factory’, *The Bombshell*, March, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 211.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Concerning Missing Friends’, *The Bombshell*, August, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> ‘A Page from a Shell's Diary’, *The Bombshell*, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 34.

‘And the girls that have been left behind, feeling sad and lone,  
Work on from morn till eve’n, or again from dark till dawn,  
For what else is left for them, the weary hours to fill;  
Sometimes they pray for patience and strength to bend their will,  
To the One alone who has the power,  
To help all in the darkest hour.’<sup>71</sup>

The editor concluded in the 1918 November issue that as the factory was no longer needed with the end of the war, The Bombshell was severing with the N.P.F. He acknowledged, ‘There can be no doubt that our “Bombshell” has made a name for itself... Yes, our Works Magazine is a favourite we are glad to say, and it will live on.’<sup>72</sup> The magazine would live on at the Norfolk Works, ‘still under the auspices of Messrs. T. Firth and Sons Ltd.’<sup>73</sup>

The Bombshell had presented a unique opportunity to the workforce of Thos. Firth & Sons, not only to contribute poetry or fiction but also to convey the conditions in which they worked, the emotions they were faced with and the friendships they made. The content was supplied by both male and female workers, as well as by men serving overseas. The contributions painted a broad picture of how life was in the factory, from “personal accounts” of visitors, such as Pepys, romantic encounters which displayed the humour of the writers to the more gritty and personal accounts which are invaluable to the historian. The contributions seen in the second year of The Bombshell were often more serious in tone than in the first, not only possibly because the magazine had enjoyed huge success and had established itself as more than just a company journal, but also because the war weariness began to reflect the general mood of the workers. The Bombshell had assisted in providing a conduit to those either working in the monotonous conditions of the factories or those dealing with the horrors of the battlefield whilst recounting experiences that would never be replicated in the same, distinctive way. The next chapter will examine the continuities and changes that would occur in The Bombshell at the Norfolk Works in its first year, also noting that the magazine was now being published out of the context of war.

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Munition Girls’, The Bombshell, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 50.

<sup>72</sup> ‘The Last Word of The Editor,’ The Bombshell, November, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Five

### New Beginnings – Continuing The Bombshell

The end of the First World War signified there would be no further need for the munitions factory at Templeborough. Even less required were its female munition workers. By the first anniversary of the Armistice, three-quarters of a million women workers across the country had been dismissed, many of whom were expected to simply return to their domestic roles in the home.<sup>1</sup> The Bombshell, beginning a fresh volume at its new residence at the Norfolk Works of Thos. Firth and Sons, would continue to serve as the firm's company journal. The editor, Mr. Marshall, remarked on *The Bombshell's* run at Templeborough; 'A particularly excellent understanding between workers and management was very noticeable at Templeboro', and this no doubt explains the magnificent results obtained.'<sup>2</sup> The magazine had proven to be an invaluable method of communicating with the workforce, it had assisted in instructing the new women employees at Templeborough and also helped to forge and maintain good working relationships. Marshall recognised that The Bombshell had been 'one of its [Firth's] enterprising productions' and would therefore continue 'to "go off" once a month.'<sup>3</sup>

The editor acknowledged the Templeborough workforce in the first Norfolk Works issue, stating; "By the time this appears in print most of the happy workers of the factory will be scattered. We wish them all success in the future."<sup>4</sup> He further proclaimed that now the war was over, 'The "Bombshell" is starting on a peace footing ... We issue our first number hoping that it will be interesting, instructive and amusing.'<sup>5</sup> Mr J. Rossiter Hoyle, the managing director of Thos. Firth and Sons, commented on the fact that The Bombshell was now being published in peace time. In a letter to the editor, published in the magazine, he stated, 'On thinking over the "Bombshell's" future, I have been inclined to wonder whether it would not have been wise to change its name when you brought it away from Templeborough.'<sup>6</sup> He explained; 'This journal has now come... to reside, and grow up, in a home of peace, and its name rather indicates the reverse.'<sup>7</sup> The editor acknowledged this and asked; 'We should be pleased to know if such a feeling is general, or if our readers consider it better to preserve our present name as a reminder that our journal came to life when the whole World was ablaze.'<sup>8</sup> It would be decided at a committee meeting, held later in the year, that the name The Bombshell would remain.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Wightman, *More Than Munitions* (Essex, 1999) p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> 'What Did You Do In The Great War?' *The Bombshell* (Sheffield Local Studies Library; 052. 74 S), March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> 'What Did You Do In The Great War?' *The Bombshell*, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> 'Foreword', *The Bombshell*, February, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, February, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> 'General Magazine Committee', August, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 294.

Whilst the name continued, not all of the regular features would. Marshall remarked that *The Bombshell* would be ‘adapted to the somewhat different circumstances of our own works.’<sup>10</sup> The circumstances being that the workforce at the Norfolk Works factory was predominantly male and the magazine no longer had to instruct a new workforce that had been thrust together at a time of war. If *The Bombshell* was to be adapted then it was to be expected that some of the content may be changed. The editorial staff would be faced with addressing the change in content whilst also attempting to maintain *The Bombshell’s* popularity as a works magazine. To explore this transformation, this chapter will examine how the change in dynamics of the workforce would affect the magazine within its first year at the Norfolk Works. In order to achieve this, the themes explored in the previous chapters will be re-examined succinctly and any continuities and changes presented in the magazine during its publication in 1919 will be investigated.

The content of *The Bombshell* was as diverse as its workforce. Poetry and stories had previously assisted in exploring the roles of the shop floor in poems and romantic, albeit tongue-in-cheek, fiction. Poetry also reflected how some staff viewed their own work by presenting parodies or comical alphabetical lists, as seen in previous chapters. As business was to return to usual on the shop floor, would content reflect or explore roles as it had done so previously and would it do so with the same humour that had made *The Bombshell* so popular? Sporting and social events were to remain in the magazine, but how much would be reported on women’s sports and social events as their roles within the firm had now diminished? Would content of *The Bombshell* continue to be provided by both sexes or would it change to suit a more male audience? This chapter will conclude that despite the ethos of the magazine remaining the same, the changing circumstances and workforce did ultimately have an effect on the content of the magazine.

The first issue of *The Bombshell*, at its new home, presented an unaccredited poem, ‘Demobilisation’, which would reflect attitudes towards women munitions workers;

‘Mary Jones, your place will be wanted,  
For a boy who is now in blue;  
He’s lost his right foot, but can do his job-  
Are you willing to let him come through?’<sup>11</sup>

The poem could not have been more direct. The Restoration of Pre-War Practices would not be made law until August 1919 and whilst many of the women workers had lost their employment with the closure of the Templeborough factory, some still remained in various positions. The poem concluded;

‘So send Tommy here when he’s ready;

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Editorial Notes’, *The Bombshell*, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Demobilisation’, *The Bombshell*, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 16.

We're glad that he's still got his life,  
And we're not going to stop him from working,  
For his home, and his kids, and his wife.'<sup>12</sup>

The following poem, also in the same issue, displayed the notion that women should be happy with taking up their roles they had performed before the war, now men were returning to their old jobs.

'How can a girl earn four pounds ten,  
By working on a shell,  
When an office girl can just get two,  
By typing from Heaven to Hell?  
Cannot the latter get up at five,  
And fight for her meal in a queue?  
But still she can smile at the shell girl now,  
Who has no more work to do.'<sup>13</sup>

The first part of the poem displayed that the hardships were equal whilst the second half was an appeal asking:

'Can they both not work side by side,  
Keeping one goal in view?  
There's plenty of room in the world for both,  
And piles and piles to do!'<sup>14</sup>

As witnessed in previous chapters, there were displays of attitudes from both sexes that expected women munition workers to return to their previous domestic roles either in the workplace or in the home. By August 1919, women who had not previously been employed in the engineering industry before the war were now prohibited to continue to work as the Restoration of Pre-War Practices became law.<sup>15</sup> Content that had previously been aimed at women, such as garment cutting or recipes, were no longer present in *The Bombshell*. Nor were women workers admonished for poor productivity, as they were now no longer in roles where they were expected to turn out shells in the thousands. Braybon and Summerfield acknowledge that some women would be more than happy to relinquish their war-time work, especially 'most middle-class munition workers who had no intention of remaining in such work beyond the war.'<sup>16</sup> Not all

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *The Bombshell*, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Warr, *Sheffield's Great War and Beyond*, p. 194.

<sup>16</sup> Braybon, & Summerfield, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

women were equally as willing to relinquish their roles. As Woollacott notes, across the country there were 'angry protests of [women] workers displaced and desperate for employment and financial security.'<sup>17</sup> The Bombshell would make no acknowledgement of any protests but did report on women workers leaving their roles.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1919, a farewell party was held for the women crane drivers in the Tinsley canteen.<sup>18</sup> The work was now to be performed 'by disabled soldiers', the women 'having willingly given up their place to the men.'<sup>19</sup> The East Shell Shop women workers would down tools later in the year, having 'served the useful purpose for which they were enlisted.'<sup>20</sup> No longer required with 'more men being available for present requirements', the 'female substitute' was to be displaced.<sup>21</sup> The East Shell Shop workers would not leave empty handed; they were to be given 'a splendid character for thoroughness and good timekeeping', which would potentially help them in gaining further employment.<sup>22</sup> Whilst most women munitions workers faced unemployment there would be other industries that would grant women employment openings 'as soon as they were discharged from munitions', the Sheffield silver and electroplating trades especially.<sup>23</sup> As women became less visible in the work place, they also began to be mentioned less frequently in The Bombshell.

The women's roles now mentioned in the magazine were jobs such working in the canteen or as window cleaners. Photographs had displayed, in earlier issues of the magazine at the Norfolk Works, some of the roles that the women had previously been involved in at the Templeborough factory. The magazine would now display the jobs women were currently performing, such as window cleaning or working in the goods department, (see fig. 14.) By displaying women's roles, The Bombshell displays it was still trying to identify with the workforce as a whole.

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<sup>17</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> 'Engineers Department Tinsley', The Bombshell, June, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 6. p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> 'Shell Shop Siftings', The Bombshell, October, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 10. p. 384.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> 'Works News and Notes', The Bombshell, October, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 10. p. 395.

<sup>23</sup> Woollacott, op. cit, p. 111.



Fig. 14. Window Cleaners – Norfolk Works Area<sup>24</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

One of the women window cleaners would submit a poem about her role, as munitions workers had previously done so. Using the penname of ‘Bee Gee’, the worker wrote;

‘We are Firth’s jolly window-cleaners,  
A merry band of sunlight beamers;  
Famed in the East as ladder-climbers,  
Fit theme for all “The Bombshell” rhymers.’<sup>25</sup>

‘Bee Gee’ would also mentioned their previous roles in the workforce during the war;

‘T’was said, “Keep the home fires burning,  
While the boys are at the front”;  
“Keep the workshop windows shining”,  
Was **our** patriotic stunt.’<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The Bombshell, April, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 4. p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> ‘The Song of the Window Cleaners’, The Bombshell, August, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 8. p. 320.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 321.



Fig. 15. Women Workers in the Goods Department.<sup>27</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

Patriotism had been portrayed through many conduits within the firm, none more so than when the company held fetes and galas. The Bombshell would continue to report on sporting events, though there was very little mention of women's sporting events, if any at all. The first mention of sports in the new magazine contained no reference to women's sport other than the acknowledgement that the 'Shell Shops have withdrawn from the League and some teams have, therefore got points added.'<sup>28</sup> Perhaps one of the most significant social events The Bombshell would report on was the Peace Day celebrations with the September issue being described as a Peace Celebration issue. Over 5,000 people attended the event at Roe Lane, many of whom were employees or their families. The occasion was reported over several pages of The Bombshell and included the results of the various sporting competitions that had been held throughout the day. The day held events for both sexes including races, long and high jumps, tossing the caber and a Punch and Judy show. The Bombshell would report on men's sports with the same dedication it had once shown in reporting women's and, whilst sporting events still signified an affirmative attitude for the males, for the women it was presented as more of a pastime.

The first acknowledgment of women's sports would be a photograph of Agnes Baxter, of the Engineers' Tool Department Swimming Club, who won the Fawcett Cup in 1918, (see fig. 16.) It would not be until the May edition of The Bombshell that women's sport would be properly

<sup>27</sup> The Bombshell, December, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 12. p. 487.

<sup>28</sup> 'Football League Table', The Bombshell, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 18.

mentioned, albeit it as a small advertisement. The announcement informed readers that the Firth Ladies Swimming Club would be opening at the Glossop Roads Baths.<sup>29</sup> Swimming was much less reported as a sport as it was now a necessity. ‘Swimming and Life-Saving’ informed readers on the importance of swimming and provided hints to bathers such as; ‘Avoid bathing when exhausted by fatigue or from any other cause’ or ‘Avoid bathing when the body is cooling after perspiration.’<sup>30</sup> The article would be present in a column for a few issues of the magazine and would also report on the different styles of swimming. This would not be the only article which would demonstrate safety awareness to the reader.

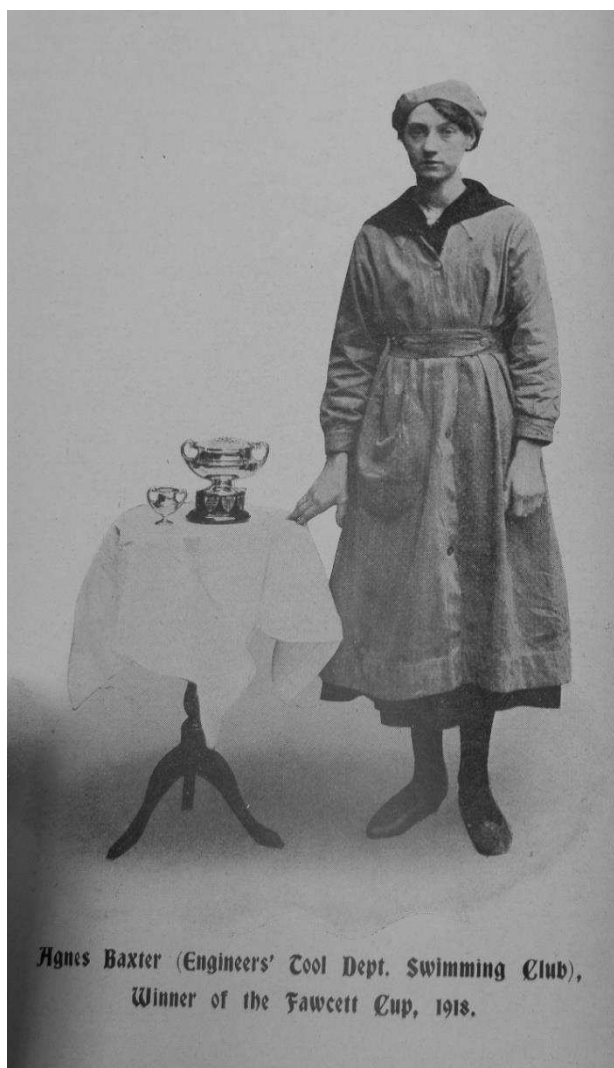


Fig. 16.<sup>31</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

‘Safety First’ would also set a more serious tone for the magazine. In 1917 the British Industrial Safety First Association had been formed and Sheffield would later ‘become the first area in the country to have its’ [sic] own safety group.’<sup>32</sup> The new feature appeared in *The Bombshell*

<sup>29</sup> ‘Sports’, *The Bombshell*, May, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 5. p. 189.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Swimming and Life-Saving’, *The Bombshell*, May, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 5. p. 183.

<sup>31</sup> *The Bombshell*, February, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 2. p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> SOHSA. (2016). [online]. <http://www.sohsa.org.uk/History>

following an accident at the Norfolk Works. The Managing Director of Firths acknowledged the new column and remarked that ‘in view of the recent regrettable fatal accident in the Foundry at Norfolk Works... no one can possibly doubt that Management and Workers can well co-operate to a mutual advantage.’<sup>33</sup> The feature would become a regular fixture in the magazine with ‘reminders’ sporadically placed throughout the magazine, (see fig. 17).



Fig. 17. Safety First Advertisement.<sup>34</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

By March 1919, magazine boxes had been scattered about the Norfolk Works for workers to submit contributions to The Bombshell. This resulted in ‘a large increase in contributions’ remarked the editor.<sup>35</sup> The editor also congratulated the Electric Furnaces Department who had created their own page, entitled ‘Sparks and Flashes by Dots and Dashes’, for the magazine, and encouraged other departments to follow suit. The Crown Works Department would also add their own page to The Bombshell in July and adopted their own inquisitive column entitled ‘Crown Works Would Particularly Like to Know.’<sup>36</sup> There would also be the return of a column previously featured in the magazine when The Bombshell was at Templeborough. ‘For the benefit of our lady readers,’ stated the editor, ‘we have engaged the services of Aunt Susie, who is prepared to give

<sup>33</sup> ‘Foreword’, The Bombshell, July, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 7. p. 252.

<sup>34</sup> The Bombshell, July, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 7. p. 257.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Editorial Notes’, The Bombshell, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Crown Works’, The Bombshell, July, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 7. p. 279.



advice on topics the depth of whose mysteries cannot be understood by mere man. We trust the ladies will inundate Aunt Susie with correspondence.<sup>37</sup> The tone of 'Aunt Susie's Corner' was intended to be one of endearment but sounded more patronising than anything else;

'If you can think of anything nice to say about your work or each other (and we can say nice things about each other, can't we, dears?), please send them to me and I will see that the editor types them out neatly.'<sup>38</sup>

The column did not last long with one reader enquiring in 'Things We Should Like to Know' just four months later; 'Where has Aunt Susie gone? Has the Ladies' Column gone defunct?'<sup>39</sup> The section 'Things We Should Like to Know' also began receiving contributions of a less than intended humorous nature. The editor remarked, 'Many queries are sent in for the... column, but some readers forget that this column is largely meant for good-natured banter and that we cannot allow the display of personal animus to be shown in the magazine.'<sup>40</sup> Sometimes the occasional snide remark would slip through the editor's net with comments such as 'Why the ladies at the Tinsley Canteen should so often be robbed of their dinners in order in order to feed "mere men".'<sup>41</sup>

A more serious tone was also reflected in the donations of literature. Gone were the romantic skits that had previously adorned the magazine. Stories were much less humorous, (if indeed humorous at all), than previously seen in *The Bombshell*. 'At Duty's Call', was written by Miss Eva Robinson and had won the prize short story, which told the story of a husband was waiting to hear on the welfare of his wife who had just given birth.<sup>42</sup> Even though the magazine welcomed contributions of material written by others, many of the stories which appeared were submitted by regular contributors, such as Hal Dawson, a member of staff from the Electric Furnaces Department, who now seemed to dominate the magazine. The editor stated in the September issue that more content by 'budding poets' would be appreciated, signalling that perhaps not much content had been submitted by different authors.<sup>43</sup>

Poetry that was contributed would see some continuity in style. The 'Norfolk Works Alphabet' commented kindly on the characteristics of some of the male workers, by name, at the factory and marked the brief return of the alphabetical poems.<sup>44</sup> A similar poem, 'An Alphabet of Fair Ladies', would later present a list of women workers names, presumably at the same works, displaying that some women's roles were still commented on in the magazine.<sup>45</sup> A parody on the poem 'If

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<sup>37</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> 'Aunt Susie's Corner', *The Bombshell*, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> 'We Should Like to Know', *The Bombshell*, August, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 8. p. 309.

<sup>40</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, April, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 4. p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> 'Things We Should Like to Know', *The Bombshell*, December, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 12. p. 481.

<sup>42</sup> 'At Duty's Call', *The Bombshell*, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. pp. 101-103.

<sup>43</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, July, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 7. p. 252.

<sup>44</sup> 'Norfolk Works Alphabet', *The Bombshell*, March, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 3. p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> 'An Alphabet of Fair Ladies', *The Bombshell*, April, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 4. p. 138.

also made a return, this time acknowledging the difficulties of performing several jobs at once. The poem concluded;

‘If added to this you can reckon in thousandth parts and tons,  
They’d make you a foreman to-morrow at Thomas Firth & Sons!’<sup>46</sup>

For the first time in the magazine, there was a display of what it was like to be as a foreman. There had been previous parodies such as the life of an editor but this new display of life as a foreman possibly marked that the magazine was no longer aimed at the shop floor worker, a notion that will be presented below.

‘Jehophosat’ would become a regular contributor to the magazine and would remark on the blandness of the Canteen menu in “Hopes Deferred.”<sup>47</sup> This would not be the only humorous nod at welfare, the Safety First campaign was also mimicked by illustrations and poems, (see fig. 18). Before Safety First became a regular feature J. E. Bradwell, an employee in the Foundry, would submit a poem praising that the scheme was for the benefit of both employer and employee. His poem concluded;

“Safety First”, let this our motto be,  
And prove in deed our loyalty,  
As workmen true, to our masters,  
And save ourselves, from disasters.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> ‘If’, The Bombshell, May, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 5. p. 192.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Hopes Deferred’, The Bombshell, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Safety First’, The Bombshell, June, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 6. p. 230.



Fig. 18. 'Safety First' Cartoon.<sup>49</sup> Reproduced with permission from Sheffield Archives.

The difference in the content of the magazine was remarked on by some employees. The editor commented in the May edition that, whilst on the shop-floor asking for input about *The Bombshell*, he had been told by an employee that 'there was too much doings about the Staff and too little about the manual workers.'<sup>50</sup> Acting on the employee's suggestion that there were 'many workmen who would be of great use in helping to get material for each month's issue,' it was decided to appoint workmen from each shop as representatives on a Sub-Editorial Staff.<sup>51</sup> It was hoped, the editor stated, that this would 'assist in making the magazine a reflex of the opinions and doings of the Firm as a whole.'<sup>52</sup>

In July 1919, the magazine would hold its first Norfolk Works General Committee meeting. Previously, at Templeborough, the magazine had possessed a committee of four men and one woman. Now the magazine would employ a committee of forty-one, with just three women as members. The committee's role was to oversee that the high standard of the magazine was maintained. One of the new aims of *The Bombshell* was for it to be 'without a rival among work journals' in the country.'<sup>53</sup> Although company journals had previously existed, *The Bombshell*

<sup>49</sup> 'Safety First', *The Bombshell*, September, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 9. p. 358.

<sup>50</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, May, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 5. p. 171.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *The Bombshell*, January, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 1. p. 12.

was now also competing with local firms' journals such as Forging Ahead, the works magazine of Daniel Doncaster & Sons Ltd of Sheffield, first published in January 1919. Similar to The Bombshell, the editor described the intention of Forging Ahead to serve as 'a permanent record... a pooling of interests, so that every employee may see at a glance the sort of organization [sic] of which he is a member, and, maybe, discover the corner to which he best can apply his gifts.'<sup>54</sup>

The Bombshell had previously acknowledged other, similar, publications and would often congratulate them on their success. It now seemed a matter of company pride that the magazine would become 'the premier place amongst Works' Magazines.'<sup>55</sup> Suggestions to the committee were acknowledged, but not always taken on board. In the October issue suggestions were made about limiting the 'Things We Should Like to Know' column though 'this was tabooed and the publication left to the discretion of the Editorial Staff.'<sup>56</sup> This had always been a popular column and it was possible that the editorial staff knew that a conduit for rumour and gossip would prove advantageous for not only communicating with the workforce but also keeping an eye on them. A suggestion to extend the number of subscribers and reducing the cost to them was also suggested, again this was acknowledged but no action was taken.

In November the regular column 'Shell Shop Siftings' reported that there had been much less interest in the previous month's magazine. This was possibly due, it admitted, with 'much of the magazine... devoted to the retirement of Mr. Laycock', the Chief Foreman of the Shell Department at the Gun Works.<sup>57</sup> The column appealed to readers that the magazine had, 'something to suit the taste of all readers articles and matter on the serious side and some written in light vein,' with 'records of sports, illustration, etc.'<sup>58</sup> 'In addition to these', it reported, 'readers are asked to submit topics of general interest for insertion.'<sup>59</sup> The column urged readers to 'Wake up! Seize the opportunity and support your own Magazine.'<sup>60</sup> The following month's editorial addressed some of the problems that the magazine had faced at its new home. 'We have tried our utmost to make it a typical Works' magazine,' announced the Editor.<sup>61</sup> He acknowledged that there had been 'many short comings and that improvements could be made in several directions.'<sup>62</sup> The Editor did, however, 'feel we have thoroughly justified our existence.'<sup>63</sup>

The Bombshell had made a difficult transition in moving to the Norfolk Works. The dynamics of the workforce had changed and the magazine was still trying to ascertain who it was trying to

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<sup>54</sup> 'Foreword', Forging Ahead, (Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, Vol. 132. No. 12. 042 SQ) Vol. 1, No. 1. p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial Notes', The Bombshell, April, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 4. p. 132.

<sup>56</sup> 'General Magazine Committee', The Bombshell, October, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 10. p. 393.

<sup>57</sup> 'Shell Shop Siftings', The Bombshell, November, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 11. p. 424.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> 'Editorial', The Bombshell, December, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 12. p. 451.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

appeal to. The original intended audience for The Bombshell had been diverse. The editor also acknowledged that some workers felt that the magazine was no longer aimed at the shop-floor workers and had attempted to address this by encouraging workers to submit contributions of their own. The magazine had previously addressed workers and their families, displaying that The Bombshell was not just a works magazine but one that could be enjoyed by all the family. There is very little evidence in the 1919 run of The Bombshell that the notion of family was addressed at all. While women employees were mentioned, it was all too infrequently. The camaraderie and support that had been displayed during the war had also diminished. The Bombshell was now delivering a magazine that would hopefully entertain a new workforce outside of a period of war whilst also competing with other Works' magazines. In endeavouring to achieve this, The Bombshell had lost some of the light-hearted relief it had set out to achieve. Despite these failings, The Bombshell would once again possess the ability to maintain a popular following after 1919 and would enjoy a long and successful run into the 1930s.

## Conclusion

### Just a Company Magazine?

This thesis has shown that by exploring The Bombshell analysis can be performed into how the culture of the workforce was represented through the company magazine. Whilst this has been achieved before, as Griffiths and Heller have demonstrated, this investigation has examined a workforce which had been thrust together at a time of war and has provided a metaphorical window into the lives of the workers in a munitions factory. Whereas oral testimonies could possibly provide similar information, the company magazine, as Griffiths stated in chapter one, could aid further investigation, either in correlation to, or when these testimonies are no longer available. The Bombshell displayed, at the end of the war, that it had successfully completed what it had set out to achieve, to provide a magazine, which was light-hearted in tone, that employees could contribute to and where they could share common interests. Yet there is more to the magazine than it just portraying an image of a happy and productive workforce and the approaches that have been used have helped to illustrate a wider historical context.

The findings in this thesis have aligned with Curran's radical, feminist, popularist and anthropological interpretations which have aided in scrutinising the content of the magazine. Throughout the magazine the anthropological interpretation has been applied to assess the culture of The Bombshell. The radical interpretation has displayed that the magazine was a medium in which the company hoped to control employees to aid high production. The fact that The Bombshell survived The Firth Worker, which had also been popular, demonstrates the employers intended to create a magazine which they could control. This interpretation has also been adopted when examining paternalism that was displayed in the magazine whether it was in the form of sports and events or sporadic cautions to the workforce, albeit mostly to the female workers. This interpretation would also be acknowledged when the magazine would move to the Norfolk Works, where the workers would demand more representation in the magazine and were subsequently given their own representatives on the editorial committee.

The feminist interpretation has assisted in examining representations of women in the factory and their lack of reference in the third volume of The Bombshell. Attitudes towards the female workers have also been explored through this interpretation, not only through the male perspective but also by some of the female staff themselves. This has opened further investigation into how women were portrayed in The Bombshell, such as though women had adopted the roles of men, attitudes still existed, from both sexes, that women were subordinate to men. As has been displayed in chapter two, there were opinions towards women workers that were not regarded as sexist or derogative at the time, though the same opinions would possibly not be appreciated or tolerated in modern society. It can be argued that some of the interpretations have merged, especially when examining how a female workforce was represented in the magazine. Both the

radical and the feminist interpretations display that it was only the female workers that were admonished when there was fear of low production on the factory floor.

The popularist interpretation has tracked the content of the magazine to display regular features through *The Bombshell*. It has shown how these would also continue or change with the magazine's transference to the Norfolk Works. The popularist interpretation also demonstrates that *The Bombshell* undisputedly played a vital role in helping to supply information to the workforce whilst also endeavouring to shape and forge identities within the workplace. Thrust together amidst a time of war, such a large workforce, unskilled and often strangers to each other, needed to be informed of policies, procedures and habitual politics of a large firm. The company magazine promoted the social aspect of working within a factory. It helped to ease social tensions and bring together workers in their passions for their comparable interests which were often represented in poetry, literature, humour and correspondences.

Humour played a significant part in *The Bombshell* and provided not only light relief when working in dangerous and monotonous conditions, but social inclusion when commenting on new work regimes and amenities. As Delap noted, investigating humour could provide a richer historical context and this it did when examining welfare, though sometimes the humour is either lost or deemed inappropriate to the modern reader. Exploring humour in *The Bombshell* has provided richer detail which has helped the reader to gain further insight into issues of factory life. Stories and poems regarding the new canteen not only display attitudes towards it, but also provide a description of how frantically busy the canteen was at mealtimes. It is the personal accounts that add additional cultural and emotional context to the object of enquiry, whether it is in the form of the canteen or the transport system. These humorous interpretations would also illustrate the importance of the amenities which may lead to further historical enquiry.

The magazine was effective in serving as a conduit, not only to display the talents of the readers, but also as a vessel in which rumour and grievances could be acknowledged in a controlled and organised fashion. The column 'Things We Want To Know' was one the more popular features of the magazine. It had been an effective way of controlling and monitoring rumour and gossip throughout the shop floor, not only in order to monitor the workforce but to also, perhaps unintentionally, to promote a sense of solidarity.

This sense of solidarity was nowhere more evident than in the events reported in the magazine. Investigating *The Bombshell* has shown the extent to which galas and sport was celebrated, commented on and enjoyed by both sexes. Women in sport was proudly reported on, but extending the investigation of *The Bombshell* to the year after the war, where the magazine was at a different works of the company and the war was over, demonstrates how these features would alter. As presented in chapter five, there would be very little mention of women's sport. Reports

on swimming was now reduced to mere instruction as the magazine continued in its role to inform and educate its workforce, which was no more evident than with the 'Safety First' campaign.

Heller and Griffiths do not distinguish between the company magazine and the in-house journal and it possible to understand why. The Bombshell's popularity displays that it was more than an in-house journal with copies of it being distributed to the workforce. It had developed an audience it had not expected through its regular light-hearted features, comedy and patriotism. It can therefore be distinguished as a magazine of the company of Thos. Firth & Sons, a company magazine. Or can it? The title company magazine more accurately describes The Bombshell when it featured more content regarding reporting on its achievements during the war, as it did during 1919, than it did displaying the interests or accomplishments of the workers of the company.

Maintaining popularity of the magazine was crucial to its survival and, as Heller notes, this was often done by embracing popular culture. The popular culture of the workforce at Templeborough was represented through The Bombshell as one of laughter, sports and a strong sense of loyalty to the firm. There now appeared to be an emphasis on professional image to maintain in The Bombshell. Other firms had taken to publishing their own magazines and the emphasis was on being the best company magazine rather than displaying the interests of the workers. Investigating The Bombshell's run in 1919 has presented the grievances that the workers felt they were no longer properly represented. Just how the committee would forge The Bombshell to become popular once again so that it would continue to "go off" in the following two decades warrants a separate investigation.

Investigating The Bombshell has provided a metaphorical window through which the researcher can catch a glimpse, albeit a relatively censored one, into the culture of a workforce in a munitions factory. It has also provided a cultural and emotional context in which further historical enquiry can be made. Through digitisation and cataloguing, many collections are becoming accessible for the first time and company magazines, such as The Bombshell, can further assist historical studies if oral testimonies are no longer available.



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